

# THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1882.

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## MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

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### CHAPTER XX.

#### THE SIGN IN THE WINDOW.

WHEN Louisa Connell woke up the morning following the arrival of the visitors at her father's house, the first thought that flashed upon her was that she had partly agreed to go with Miss Evelyn Agate to consult the Oriental Mystery.

Louisa shrank from the expedition, in spite of the latent inclination that drew her towards it. She did not want to deceive her parents, she did not want to act contrary to Marco Learli's wish; but then she desired to propitiate Evelyn, rather than to offend her, and she herself ardently desired to go. Her parents? Well—as for her parents—she thought she would tell them herself when the adventure was over. Philip would make peace for her. She knew Mrs. Connell could not bear to blame her boys during their brief visits at home. As for Miss Cleare, Louisa decided that she always had a strange way of looking at matters: as if everything must be right or wrong. Would Miss Cleare keep the secret of the clandestine visit? Louisa feared not. Miss Cleare must be put off the track: kept in the dark.

"I'm glad it is a fine morning!" exclaimed Louisa, as she saluted her, when they met. "Some of us must seize the opportunity of taking Miss Agate to the Cave."

This was a locality connected with a legend which Philip had told to Frank and Marco during their journey to Colburn—the legend of Mary and Stephen, the lovers of Detting: one of whom was simple and the other wicked, and so disaster supervened.

Alice looked up brightly. "Then you have given up that woman!" she said. "I am so glad!"

"I don't suppose anybody will say another word on that subject," returned Louisa, rather shortly. "I'm sure I shall not. I hope no one else will."

Alice thought Miss Connell had been hurt by the little sympathy she had shown with the matter the evening before. But she said nothing, knowing that all wounds heal quicker if not tampered with.

At breakfast, Louisa suggested the visit to the Cave. Philip took up the proposal eagerly, and Evelyn, looking from one to the other, professed her entire delight in falling in with any plan they had formed, provided it was not troublesome to themselves.

"Rather a bright idea, that of yours, Louisa," remarked Philip, later, drawing the two girls for a minute into an adjoining room. "Had we gone out vaguely 'for a walk,' that good little governess of ours might have looked so conscious as to be asked what the trouble was, and while her conscience would have bade her tell the truth, her kindness would have made it hard to do so. We have no right to give our uncanny secrets to other people to keep. Let us do our own deceptions."

Louisa started. Though passing somewhat out of the track of filial duty, she had scarcely seen what would come of going a-drift.

People never drift upwards! In a downward course, we ever seem to be crying "too late!" and only as we leave our "too-lates" behind us do we see that each of them might have been "just in time."

"I do mean to go to the Cave," she answered, colouring.

"Of course, we all do: only we mean to go somewhere else also," observed Evelyn, with a light laugh.

"There won't be much time, then," suggested Philip. "Mother has been too often to the Cave, not to know how long it takes to get there and to explore its beauties. I don't mean that she is likely to watch us to see whether we are out of her sight half-an-hour longer than might be expected," he added, detecting a look that was very like a sneer passing across Evelyn's face, and resenting it; "but in her kindly, innocent way, she'll ask us where we have been and all sorts of things."

"Can't we get the witch herself to the Cave?" cried Evelyn, throwing up her hands in an ecstasy of delight at the bright idea. "Can't we send her word that a party of three wish to consult her there if she will meet them at the time appointed? Then all you say will be strictly true, you know," turning to Louisa, "as you seem so anxious that it should be."

She could not keep the tone of the last words quite free from mockery. Evelyn herself had no conscience, and despised those who had one. She might dislike Alice Cleare, but she despised Louisa Connell.

"A capital plan, if it can be done," acquiesced Louisa. "The

woman could not have the least suspicion as to who we are—she won't even know that we are Colburn people."

"I'll write the note," Evelyn went on eagerly. "Nobody here knows my hand-writing. But, who is to take it?"

"I," said Philip. Evelyn reflected. She was far-seeing.

"But look here, Mr. Philip, shall you take the letter in? Because, in that case, one need not be written—a message would do as well. And if you don't take it in, how shall we know whether she agrees to go to the Cave or not?"

Philip had not thought of this.

"You see the difficulty, do you not?"

"Yes, I see it," said Philip; "but I do not want to see *her*. Whatever she may be, wise-woman or impostor, you may be sure she is sharp, and good at that mental arithmetic known as 'putting two and two together.' It is not likely she has imparted that gift to the Daylight Villa domestic, nor is that young personage very likely to know me on her own account, yet ——"

"Oh, leaving the letter is simple enough," interrupted Evelyn, impatiently. "The rub is, how are we to get an answer?"

A smile, suppressed instantly, crossed Philip Connell's lips. "Listen, Miss Agate," said he. "You have undertaken to be good enough to write this momentous epistle: how do you mean to word it?"

"Will it matter how? Perhaps you can tell me?"

"Well, you might say that a small party, about to visit the Cave at—let us say—eleven o'clock this morning, wish to meet her there. There will be nothing in that to let her guess, as Louisa says, that we are Colburn people. And say that if she can come, she is requested to put a green book outside the red blind of her parlour window, and that will be understood as a sign of assent. If she cannot come, let her put a white paper."

"But may she not see you watching, Philip?" interrupted Louisa.

"No, my clever sister, she may not, and will not; for I can see those windows from the railway platform and the railway waiting room, and in neither of these places can I be seen from the windows of Daylight Villa."

"I think it's a capital plan," said Evelyn, "and I'm sure I can't think of any other. You see we not only give her no clue as to our identity, but even in a slight, unsuspecting kind of way, we mislead her a little."

"I'm not sure that that is quite fair," hesitated Louisa; which caused the other two to laugh heartily. And she sat down to write the note.

Philip took it from her, and went out quickly, passing Frank in the hall: in truth, there was little time to lose. He did not tell Frank where he was going, nor had Frank been asked to join the party to the Cave. The tacit consent by which he had been left out, along with Alice Cleare, struck Philip as curious.

Philip was not long in reaching shabby Daylight Villa. Thrusting his missive into a grimy hand, stretched from behind the door to receive it, in answer to his knock, he started off for his coign of vantage in the railway station. So far he had succeeded beyond his hopes : he had been seen by nobody—certainly not by the owner of the grimy hand. The morning was lovely and exhilarating,—as bright and clear as a morning in smoke-canopied Colburn could be ; much more bright than Philip himself ; for, now that he had fairly entered on the treason, he somehow did not like it.

Why was Frank left out ? It was an accident, he supposed ; and perhaps it would not have been the right thing to call him away from Mrs. Raven on the first morning of her visit. Yet Philip felt vexed on his own score, and antagonistic to Evelyn Agate. Forgetting that he had himself offered his services, he wondered why she need have chosen him as an ally. Next he began to doubt whether he had done right to sanction Louisa's tacit disobedience to what they both knew must be the will of their father and mother.

Altogether, Philip Connell, as he watched and waited, was not best pleased with himself. He half hoped the assenting sign would not appear in the dingy red-draped window.

Suddenly the dusky curtain stirred, and a book with a green cover was thrust into the middle pane.

Philip started home at the top of his speed. It was part of the plan that they must reach the Cave before the sorceress did, that she might not see they arrived together, or from what quarter they came. Besides, the latter part of the road was straight and lonely, and it would be a ridiculous situation for them all—she and they—to be toiling along in the same direction, within each other's ken.

He found both of the girls in the parlour, ready dressed and waiting for him—Louisa looking rather self-conscious and downcast, but Evelyn chatting suavely with Mrs. Connell over the legend and the natural curiosities of the Cave.

"It is delightful that we have found this pleasant way of relieving you of our tiresome presence," she said, laughing. "We know that you and dear Mrs. Raven and her son must have a vast deal to say to one another, and be longing for a quiet hour together."

Neither Mrs. Connell nor Frank responded to this pretty speech. Evelyn kissed Mrs. Connell as she passed out.

That lady's self-opinion was sinking to zero. For must it not be sheer hard-heartedness which made her give her cheek an involuntary rub after Evelyn's salute ?

"To think that I should grudge a homeless girl kissing me !" she thought, silently, "a girl who has never had a mother of her own to kiss. But I don't like her ; no, I do not. Why do I not ? Is it because she is Mrs. Raven's companion ? and that I don't like Mrs. Raven ? Nonsense ! It is something in the girl herself. When she is glib and forward it offends me ; and when she does what seems



right and nice, I almost think I hate her. Is this Miss Agate a great favourite of yours, Frank?" added Mrs. Connell aloud.

"I do not know much of her," replied Frank. "I don't like her as I like the elder Miss Agate—the lady in whose house I met her. But then *she* is one of hundreds." If he had not seen Alice Cleare, it is probable he would have said "of thousands."

"I am not attracted to this girl, I confess," said Mrs. Connell. "To tell the frank truth, there's something in her which repels me. But she seems to suit your mother perfectly. Mrs. Raven has been praising her to me this morning."

Meanwhile the walking party had got far on their road. It was not a particularly attractive road, though it opened from the west end of the town, farthest from the mills and the foundries. It might once have had a gentle, pastoral beauty—the loveliness of fresh hedge-rows, fertile acres, and blooming gardens. But these mild charms yield only too readily to the inroads of smoke, brick-making, and a rough, shifting population. Here and there a heavy-eaved cottage, with a few sturdy shrubs haggardly enduring their hard conditions, remained to tell of what had been; but most of the houses were poor, small villas of the second-rate sort, inhabited by people who find a slippery ground between the "working classes" and the "shabby genteel." Nor did beauty increase when the last dwelling was passed.

At last the group reached the moor—a wild, flat waste, on which it seemed improbable that anything so romantic as a cave could exist. The merry-makers of the past summer had left desolation behind them in the shape of some black patches of burned under-wood, but there were still masses of bracken, dying down in ruddy gold. And here and there, among the bushes, might be seen a grey boulder, revealing the more picturesque possibilities of the soil. A foot-path, striking off from the high road, led to the Cave. The moor was not so flat as it seemed in its treeless desolation; and they were presently on a slight upland, from which, looking round, they could realise their utter solitude. Not another living creature was in sight.

"We shall see this woman as she comes along," spoke Evelyn.

"Scarcely," returned Philip. "Nearer the Cave the way dips. It lies quite in a hollow: I have sometimes thought it should be called the Burrow."

They went on again, rather silently. Louisa was neither easy nor happy; and Philip still felt out of tune. As for Evelyn, she was meditating upon the approaching business. Must these two, her companions, hear all the wise woman might say to her? She did not want that. The more she heard of what she was secretly longing for, the better food would it no doubt be for Philip's ridicule. And yet, when she was their guest—when this morning's expedition could not have been made without their help—above all, when she was by no means unwilling to hear what should be said to *them*, it

would be singularly ungracious, if not impossible, to seek for herself special secrecy. Possibly some way might be found out of the difficulty?

At last the Cave was reached. It was a dismal enough spot; quite in keeping with the dreary old story of sin and woe which had given it an individuality above that possessed by the many similar and scarcely more insignificant natural hiding-places that might be found on that desolate heath. The ground around the Cave was trodden bare and hard, and reckless hands had been tearing at the hardy vegetation which nature had thrown over the rude lines of its arch.

"It is very like a London cellar," exclaimed matter-of-fact Philip, stooping to creep in.

The girls followed him, daintily holding up their skirts. They seemed to make quite a crowd in the little place; it was so very small. "Not much room here for the witch," went on Philip.

"She can hold her interview with each of us separately, and the other two can wait outside," said Evelyn, eagerly. If she had to sacrifice hearing the talk to Philip and Louisa, why she must. Of one thing Evelyn felt certain—that she could trust Louisa at least to tell her the whole truth. "She is just the girl that could not keep it to herself," was her disparaging reflection.

"I will not be left with the woman alone," cried out Louisa, in a panic.

Evelyn laughed. "Then I will stay with you, dear," she said: "and your brother can wait outside until you join him. I do not fear being left alone with her."

Philip was studying the initials with which the stony inside walls of the little den were covered, as well as he could see for the obscurity. "What a small sense of congruity most people seem to have," he remarked. "Fancy lovers bracketing their names in a place that bears such a tradition as this: a story of perjured love and deadly sin!"

"Oh, they don't think about that," was Evelyn's jaunty comment.

"My father has often said he wished the place could be destroyed," Philip went on, feeling an irresistible impulse to say things with which he knew Evelyn would have no sympathy. "It has no natural beauty, and it has an evil association. He really believes there might have been a perceptible difference in Colburn if the holiday pilgrimages of its population could have been made to some great man's birth-place or some good man's grave instead of to—this!" And he kicked the stubborn wall as if he would like to shake it to its foundation.

"Don't do that while I am inside, please," cried Evelyn.

As she spoke, the little light which penetrated to the interior was darkened; and the opening to the Cave was nearly filled up by the form of a tall woman.

The Oriental Mystery had arrived.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## IN THE CAVE.

THE Oriental Mystery had arrived. And they had not seen her until she was in their very midst; a fact for which not one of them could ever account.

Both the young ladies started, not excepting Evelyn, and Louisa turned white.

"Are you all here?" asked the new comer, in a cold, hard voice, without any attempt at greeting.

"We are, madam," assented Philip, who retained all his easy equanimity. "It is very good of you to be so obliging and so punctual."

She only acknowledged his words by a slight inclination of the head. She had moved within the arched entrance, and she halted there, standing to face them with her back to the light, so that she could see their faces fully, while her own remained in shadow.

"I am quite ready," she said. "There is no reason for any delay. People must not think I court it for any reasons of my own. The time I can spare is brief."

Louisa had laid hold of Evelyn as if for protection. In truth she felt more agitated than the occasion called for.

"With which of us will you speak first, madam?" asked Philip, by way of commencement.

"What can that matter to me? You should have settled that among yourselves," said the woman, with some reproach in her dull, monotonous voice.

"But we want a little information," Philip said, giving to his manner that suave courteousness with which he usually stormed the hearts of elderly ladies. "Do you remain conscious while you speak with your visitors? I know some clairvoyantes do not."

"That depends entirely upon circumstances," she replied. "Sometimes I do, sometimes I do not. While my eyes are open I am conscious, when they close my bodily sense has passed away."

"And do you speak to us of your own spontaneous will, madam? Or do you require that we put questions to you?"

"That also depends on circumstances," she repeated, with an impatient wave of her hand, as if anxious to get to business. "If there be no reason otherwise, it is best that I speak first, and that your questions follow."

The little party whispered a word or two among themselves as to who should first stand forward. The place was certainly uncomfortably full, as they had said it would be, and its atmosphere was damp and heavy. Louisa's courage was evidently ebbing fast, so they told her she had better take the first turn, Evelyn remaining with her.

Then Evelyn and Philip could take their turns each alone, so that the other might keep Miss Connell company outside.

Philip went out, brushing the skirts of the Oriental Mystery as he passed by her; and, when outside, he felt how grateful were the fresh air and the common daylight. He had thrown himself into the scheme for fun's sake; but, now he had entered into it, he did not find it fun at all, rather the contrary. In fact, an uncomfortable feeling lay upon Philip, which he could not at all account for. Pacing up and down outside the Cave, he wished the Sibyl would be quick over her work, and have done with it.

The Sibyl apparently intended to lose no time. At the side of the entrance a rough stone, forming a seat, projected from the wall. The woman sat down upon it at once. Her face there was in deeper shade than before, while the young ladies, facing her still, stood in the light, Louisa a little forward.

"You have a wish in your heart," she began to Louisa, not touching her hand, or going through any of the ordinary pantomime of sorcery. "You have had a happy life. I see its line behind you, bright and clear. Is that so?"

"Oh, yes."

"But here—quite near—hardly passed—I see a seashore, and you walking on it—not alone. There has mingled with your line of life another, and his line of life looks dark and stormy. His name begins with the letter L. In his other name there is an O, but it does not begin it. Is that true?"

"It may be," faltered Louisa.

"I cannot see your future clearly," said the sorceress. "As far as it belongs to yourself only, it is calm and tranquil. There is a tie between you and somebody that is broken. I have seen him lately, I think: somebody who has a happy life, too. I cannot distinctly remember."

Evelyn and Louisa exchanged a glance. They knew Percy must be meant. Louisa was no longer confidential with him as of yore.

"But that other life that has crossed yours—there is no calmness there! I hear a sound as of a nation shouting. I see crowds running and seizing newspapers and eagerly reading them ——"

"Are they joyous or angry crowds?" interrupted Louisa, faintly.

The woman paused. "I think they are glad," she said, and paused.

"But though you can see all this," observed Evelyn, taking advantage of the pause to speak, "yet you cannot say confidently that this young lady's life and that other life will mingle in the future."

The Sibyl turned her face towards the speaker. In the gloom, Evelyn could see that her eyes were firmly shut now.

"No," she answered. "You know your vision has its limits; so has mine—though it reaches farther than ordinary sight."

"Will it be well if they do mingle?" pursued Evelyn.

"Let your friend ask her questions herself," rebuked the woman, sternly.

"Will it be well—well for us both?" whispered Louisa.

"Things must go very well before that life and yours can mingle," came the chilling answer, in which Louisa fancied there lay a sound as of hope mocked at. "Do not wish for it too much. Hearts may ache in purple and ermine. Have you anything else to ask me?"

"Can you tell me something about my present life?" said Louisa. Her heart rebelled against the tone of these foreshadowings, and she would have been thankful that this strange woman should prove herself to be only an impostor, hazarding guesses.

"There are strangers about you," said the woman slowly, knitting her brows. "People are sojourning in your home who do not live there. This is but a stranger by your side now; not any old friend; you saw her for the first time but lately—a day or so ago. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"There is another, too, an elder lady. She speaks in a low, quiet voice, and there's a troubled look at times in her face and eyes. Her secrets are her own, and they are dangerous ones. Next, there is a young man, and"—she paused here—"I see that young man distinctly."

"Can you describe him?" asked Evelyn, with almost feverish eagerness, willing, perhaps, to test her further.

"He is tall," she said in answer, "and his hair is brown, with gold dust in it. He has clear, darkish eyes; I think they are grey. He does not speak much just now. He is sad at heart. I should like to see him, too. I could show him why he is sad, though he has never disclosed the reason to living mortal: and I could perchance show him more than that. Tell him I say this," she continued, after a moment's stillness. "Tell him to come to me."

"Does he know that we are here?" inquired Evelyn.

The woman paused again. "I think not," she answered, with considerable hesitation.

"Can you foresee whether he will come to you, or not, if we deliver him your message?" Evelyn proceeded: and the woman appeared not to like the tone—perhaps not the questions.

"I hope he will come—for his own good," was the cold reply, and she moved her face somewhat restlessly. "No more yet. Am I now being consulted by you—or by the young lady who spoke to me first?"

"Have you quite finished?" whispered Evelyn to Louisa. "You look pale: you will be better for some fresh air."

"I should like to ask one question more," said Louisa to the fortune-teller: "it is about—that other life you speak of. Is not it, too, very sad? Could you show it, too, how to be happy?"

The woman shook her head slowly. "Yes, it is sad now," she answered. "As to the future—— The eagle loves the storm, and



the lion scents after blood : they do not care for sunshine and clover, or for what ordinary people may count as happiness : they rejoice in turbulence. Let the linnet and the lamb beware how they mate with such."

"Your face is so white, dear," urged Evelyn. "I am growing quite alarmed for you."

"It is needless," gasped Louisa ; "I have finished now."

She passed out as she spoke, groping almost blindly, and nearly stumbled over a stone. Philip, outside, caught her hand ; he stared at her white face.

"What, in the name of wonder, has she told you?" he asked. "You look as if the oracle had been of coffins and skulls, death watches and midnight phantoms."

"She has told me nothing horrible," said Louisa. "And yet—there seems something in it terrible to think of! She spoke correctly of our home, and ourselves, and our guests. What can have revealed it all to her? She actually described our cousin Frank—and she wants to see him! She says she can speak to him about something which he never mentioned to anybody in the world, and that it will be for his good."

"So-ho!" whistled Philip, catching an idea, and believing he saw "method in the seer's madness." Had this innocent-looking cousin of his, secrets of his own? If so, they might perhaps account for much in his conduct which had seemed so unaccountable. In the human interest of this matter, Philip, for a moment, forgot its weird surrounding. But he presently wondered how, if there were such secrets, this woman could have found them out. Fancies chased each other rapidly through his brain. Could she be an adventuress, dodging Frank, and preying upon some old peccadillo? But that suggestion had to be renounced in a moment. Her coming to Colburn had been publicly advertised in the local papers actually before he and Frank had put in their appearance there. Louisa said a little more, which only seemed further to perplex him. But the mysteriousness of it all—that which frightened Louisa and fascinated Evelyn—only irritated Philip.

"I would give a golden guinea not to have been mixed up in the affair," was his inward reflection. "I only encouraged it for a moment's fun; and that I might study Mademoiselle Evelyn in a new light: and now she has put me right out of court, and I've got worse than nothing for my pains."

Meanwhile, the second colloquy had commenced inside the Cave, the woman speaking first. "Stand quite opposite me," said she, in a commanding tone. "I know what you want to ask."

Evelyn obeyed. Her eyes were growing accustomed to the dim light, and she could discern, though indefinitely, the large, strongly-marked features and bushy eyebrows of the Mystery's face.

"There is darkness," the woman began, in a slow, inert tone. "On

the darkness I see some signs. I see a figure 4 and a big moon, like a harvest moon. Can you understand that?"

"I think so," said Evelyn, involuntarily trembling. She remembered her birth-date, in the harvest month—September.

"The scene is ever shifting," the woman went on; "but in it there is always a little baby—a girl-child. Nobody cares much for it. It is never at home. It was not born in any of the places where I see it. It is—I think—yes, it is yourself."

Evelyn Agate bent forward in her eagerness. "Where was the child born?" she asked breathlessly.

"I see a young mother on a couch watched by an elder woman," the speaker went on evenly, as if she had not noticed the interruption. "I only see the couch. The mother knows that her child is to be taken from her. But she is sleeping when it really goes. Her love goes after it. I see its line behind you. That mother and child will meet again—if they have not already met."

"Do you mean to say I have seen my own mother?" burst forth Evelyn.

"I am not sure," came the slow answer. "It may be. I only see knots on that line of love, and that means something between you and her."

"Can you see her?—What is she like?—Is she a lady?" Evelyn asked impetuously, thrown quite out of her usual composure.

"She is very pale, as I see her: I do not see her distinctly," replied the Sibyl, moving her face in distress as if she wished to open, and could not, her closed eyelids. "Your childhood and youth have not been unhappy. Strangers have befriended you—cared for you."

"And those strangers have no idea who I am?" remarked Evelyn, in a questioning tone. For she had allowed herself at times to doubt whether Gertrude Agate's assertion of entire ignorance was quite sincere. The generosity she had shown to the nameless foundling was utterly incomprehensible to Evelyn.

"They have not the faintest idea," rapidly replied the woman. "I see the years pass on and on," she continued. "I see you then go from that home of early adoption to a great house: it seems to be recently. You feel quite at home there—as if you had been born to live in such places. Perhaps that is so."

"Shall I ever have such a house for my own?" whispered Evelyn.

"Yes," said the Sybil, with sudden energy. "Yes, if you marry one whom you have seen but lately, quite lately. A young man—tall and fair. He is in the same house with you now. You do not think he cares for you. Perhaps he does not. But he will care. When he approaches you with attention, smile on him. If his wooing seem harsh and cold, never mind. You must marry him. He is your Fate.—Be still an instant, or you will interrupt the vision.—Yes: your Fate. I see the life-line between you. If it draw closer, you have wealth, and rank, and luxury. If it does not,

there is for you nothing but servitude and dependence to the end of your days."

"And for him?" murmured Evelyn, with a beating heart.

"It will not matter much to him," the other answered, coldly.

"When your eyes shall be open," whispered Evelyn, "can you read the palm of my hand?"

The woman laughed. "I can read it with my eyes shut," she said. "It is a smooth hand without many lines. But it has one strange sign: it is the mark of an event which shall change the whole current of your life. Beware of it. Beware of being swayed by stray impulses of your fancy. Beware of strangers."

"Can you see what that event is?"

"I cannot."

"Can you give me any test by which I may know that I can trust your wonderful power?" faltered Evelyn.

"Test!" echoed the woman, a shade of anger in her voice. "Is not my knowledge of your mysterious birth and infancy quite enough? What will satisfy you?"

"Tell me something about my old home in London," pleaded Evelyn. "Something that my own past experience can verify."

The witch pressed her left hand rapidly on her heavy eyelids, and as rapidly withdrew it. "Eugh!" she said with a shiver, "I see a man there who was mad once. I hear the shrieks he gave. And there was a woman who died. Nothing further of that is revealed to me—it is quite dark. You were—yes—I think I am right—you were a very young baby at the time, but you seem not to have been yet in the house. Is that true?" she broke off. "Does that content you?"

"It is true," said Evelyn, a chill shudder creeping through her own frame. "I am satisfied that you know what you speak of—that these things have been revealed to you. But you have told me nothing about my father," she added quite humbly.

"Not much about him is given me to tell," quietly avowed the woman. "When I search for your father in the vision, I get confused. I see but green lanes and wide fields. And—yes—wait—there are two men following each other; one looks older than the other, and whether they are in the flesh still or not, I cannot discern. The elder man wears a long cloak, and where he walks it seems always moonlight."

"Does that mean that he is dead?" hazarded Evelyn.

There was no reply. The woman wore an anxious look, and slightly moved from side to side as if seeking for something. "I can do no more for you to-day," she said, presently. "Things elude me. The vision concerning you is departing."

Evelyn, disappointed, waited a minute or two, but the mysterious woman remained perfectly still: all was evidently over. "I will send in the gentleman now," she said, passing out of the Cave.

The brother and sister were seated side by side on a mound. Philip obeyed Evelyn's call with a grimace of contempt and distaste.

"What has she said to you?" asked Louisa eagerly, as Evelyn took Mr. Connell's vacated place.

"Oh, the ordinary farrago," returned Evelyn, with well-assumed indifference. "She has promised me a rich husband."

"But I'm sure she is not a common fortune-teller," urged Louisa; "or an impostor either. Think of the things she told me—think of the private matters she knows about."

"Oh, she has told me some facts that I cannot understand how she became possessed of," admitted Evelyn, coldly. She felt that to disclose the advice she had received, having rapidly made up her mind to follow it, would be as bad policy as to show one's cards when playing at whist. "They were facts about my own childhood, and my home in London, Miss Louisa," she carelessly said aloud, and would have dropped the conversation. Evelyn did not know how much or how little of her history might be known to any of the Connells, Philip excepted.

"And to think," exclaimed Louisa, "of her describing Frank Raven!—and of her wanting to see him! What can it be that she has to tell him?—what is it that he knows and she knows, and that nobody else in the wide world knows?" Louisa was running on in excitement, when both the girls started up with an exclamation. Philip had emerged from the Cave, a strange smile on his face.

"I have not been so fortunate as you were, young ladies," he said, drily. "Sit still, please, and make room for me beside you. Our mysterious friend wishes us to wait here, until she has gained a fair start of us on the way back to the town. She does not care to follow our steps, she says, lest it might be thought she took the opportunity to track out where we live, or any other information concerning us: which might tend to throw doubt on her revelations should any more of our circle choose to consult her."

"Now I should never have thought of that precaution myself," admitted poor Louisa. "Tell us what she said to you, Philip?"

"Hush! It will keep until she is fairly out of the way," he answered. Nor did their strange acquaintance try their patience long. Almost as Philip spoke, she came out of the Cave, and passed close by them; but without a word. They sat silently watching her as she moved rapidly away. She was a sufficiently commonplace figure. Anybody, meeting her on the moor, would have set her down, as a substantial tradesman's wife, or an upper servant from some of the big houses. She wore a brown stuff dress, a figured shawl, and a close bonnet with a bunch of artificial flowers. Only, her face was screened by a thick gauze veil, such as is seldom worn, without some special infirmity or reason for secrecy.

"She is not altogether one's ideal of a witch—is she?" remarked Philip.

"And now, Philip: let us hear what she told you?" pleaded Louisa.

"She told me—nothing!" answered Philip. "She told me I did not live here—but in a great city, among books and papers. She told me that I shall never be very rich nor very poor, and that I have a few debts to the bad, which I shall discharge in good time. She told me that I was in love with somebody, whom—as it happens—I do not even like. She added that this young lady will never marry me; which I am sure is quite true, for the best of all reasons—that she will never be asked to."

Evelyn looked up. "Perhaps the grapes are sour, Mr. Connell?"—and there was a touch of acidity in her tone and smile.

"Perhaps they are *not*," he rejoined, letting his honest eyes rest on hers for a moment. "Well, that comprises my fortune—and it is not much."

"Much! it's nothing," cried Louisa. "It seems as though she had done best with me. Her knowledge about things—about our visitors at home, was certainly remarkable."

"Daylight Villa overlooks the railway station?" interposed Philip. "She may have seen our visitors arrive. It may be one of the duties of her profession to watch the trains go in and out."

"This morning, you yourself said that the platform could not be seen from the villa, Philip. And if it could; if she saw you and Frank arrive a day or two ago, and Aunt Raven and Miss Agate yesterday, how would that serve her? It would not tell her that Frank is quiet and sad, or show her the colour of his eyes; or that Mrs. Raven is pale and quiet and goes about with a troubled look in her face, and has ——"

"Has what?" cried Philip; for his sister stopped abruptly.

"Secrets of her own, and they are dangerous ones," completed Louisa. "It was what the woman said, Philip. I did not mean to repeat it, but it slipped from me."

"Better not repeat it again, then," said Philip, with a glance at Evelyn, which told he meant to include her in the warning. "Fortune-tellers keep such sayings on hand. It is their stock-in-trade."

"She connected me with Percy," went on Louisa; "as good as said I was his sister. How could she know that? She never saw me in her life before: and I'm sure she could not see much of me in the Cave, it was too dark. I could not see her a bit; I shouldn't know her face again."

"She took care to sit with her back to the light," remarked Philip. "However, there was no other seat."

"She told me the initial letters of a name ——"

"Wonderful woman!" interjected the young barrister.

"I don't think you need scoff at it, Philip!" retorted his sister. "If she told you nothing about yourself, I expect it was because there's nothing to tell."



"She told you the initial letter, or letters, of the name she connected with your own, Miss Connell," put in Evelyn, with much apparent innocence. "It was ——"

"Halloa! what's that?" struck in Philip. "A name connected with Louisa's. Why ever was this, the greatest wonder of all, kept so long in the background?"

"Oh, you must expect these people to talk a good bit of nonsense; you have just said so yourself, Philip," was Louisa's quiet answer, given in confusion. "It would be silly to regard all they say. The curious part is, how they manage to get hold of any facts at all."

"And what are the facts in this case?" questioned Philip of his sister, noting, with surprise, the burning blushes on her face.

"She only said that at the seaside we made a friend with an L in his name," Louisa replied, her face growing more aflame as she was obliged to answer.

"That must have been Learli! It was he you met at Sandgate."

"And as we know his deep interest in politics," continued Louisa quickly, "it seemed very singular she should mention shouting crowds—and heaps of newspapers—and all that, in connection with Marco's name."

Evelyn gave a short, light laugh. This was all Louisa cared to tell her brother; and she looked at Miss Agate with imploring eyes. Evelyn returned the gaze significantly, and grew grave again. It might be policy to keep Miss Connell's secret—at any rate for the present.

"It is odd," said Philip, "that neither to Percy yesterday, nor to any of us to-day, Madame la Sorcière, when boasting of her extensive acquaintance with the inmates of our house, made not the least allusion to Alice Cleare."

"And did she not?" returned Evelyn, questioningly. "I thought she might have been the mysterious young lady whom Mr. Philip Connell is to find so adamantine."

Philip fired; the natural antagonism between himself and this girl was cropping up. He hated her satirical tone; he resented her making believe to think he had spoken slightly of the little governess; indeed, he disliked her bringing Alice into such a light at all. But, angry though he felt, he subdued it instantly, and kept his coolness.

"I have only known Miss Cleare for two or three days," he said carelessly. "An impostor, trying to make an effect, would naturally bring forward one of my older acquaintances—people met in London, for example. Still, I wonder Miss Cleare was not alluded to. Even Mrs. Raven was."

"She didn't mention the servants, either," said Evelyn, pointedly. "I suppose she takes that kind of people as not counting in a house." It exasperated Philip.

"Oh well—yes—ah, of course you are a visitor while you are with us—yes, to be sure," Philip cried, thoroughly on edge, and, for once, quite unable to hold back his retort or soften it into repartee.

"So you really think she is only an impostor?" Louisa interposed, noting, but not quite understanding, the suppressed anger in her brother's voice, and willing to efface it. Among her younger brothers and sisters she had always been in the habit of saying she did not know who was in the right, but she did know who was making a noise; and on that individual her mild punishments would fall. "Philip, do you think we shall get Frank to visit her?"

"If you want to do that," said Philip, "you will have to tell him we have been here to-day."

"I don't see that it follows, as a matter of absolute necessity," dissented Evelyn.

"What should you think, Philip, if she could really tell him something he has never mentioned to anybody? Would you still deem her an impostor?" urged Louisa.

"I shall reserve my judgment until the case comes before me," laughed Philip, recovering his usual good humour. "And now, as that learned lady has betaken herself to a safe distance, we may as well be walking homewards."

And they returned to Colburn in nearly unbroken silence, each one absorbed in private thought.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A MIDNIGHT CRY.

WHEN the party reached home, Evelyn Agate answered all inquiries as to her enjoyment of the expedition and her interest in the Cave with great readiness and fluency. Mrs. Raven remarked mildly that "she, too, must go and see this wonderful place;" upon which Mrs. Connell said that they might take a drive there some afternoon, though really there was not much to see.

Louisa Connell envied her visitor's coolness. It did not occur to her, as it did to Philip, that a person with such perfect powers for misleading and concealing, and so ready a will to exercise them, might be a dangerous person, never fully to be trusted. Not that Philip took a very high moral view of the matter. Evelyn was what she was, and it was her own affair.

"She has kept them all off our track this time," he thought, "and she will keep me off some other track on some future occasion."

And then he half wished that, by some turn of circumstances not quite inconsistent with what he called "honour"—such, for instance, as an apparently unguarded slip of the tongue—he could let Mrs. Raven and his parents know what had been the true motive and end

of that morning's ramble, and how thoroughly this girl could hood-wink them and everybody.

Everybody? No. As he looked down the table (for they were sitting at the mid-day meal), he caught Alice Cleare's eye. It had a conscious light in it which revealed tales. Could Louisa have told her anything? He felt sure she would not do so. Besides, there had been no opportunity for private conversation since they returned from the moors.

"She knows as well as possible that we have interviewed the Mystery," quoth Philip to himself. "Miss Cleare must be a witch on her own account!"

He wondered whether she would ask any question or drop any hint. But she did not. She went out with her pupils in the afternoon; and later, when the tea was over, and the children were in bed, she did not, as usual, join the circle in the drawing-room. Louisa, too, withdrew to her own chamber.

The party seemed dull; conversation flagged. At length Evelyn proposed to play a duet with Philip, who was a fair musician. Perhaps she wished to conciliate one of whom she felt somewhat afraid. Philip complied with gracious suavity, and they went off to the piano at the other end of the room—which left Mr. and Mrs. Connell, Mrs. Raven and Frank together. Percy was busy at a remote table with a mechanical drawing.

"I think you are fortunate in your governess, sister," observed the lady of Ravenscourt. She often called Mrs. Connell by that title, thereby jarring that good woman's sensibilities from head to foot. "Miss Cleare never obtrudes herself—and how fond the children seem of her! Nor does she seem to be that check on family intercourse which governesses so often are."

"That is true," answered Mrs. Connell, thankful to take up any conversation quite safe from personal feeling. "Sometimes I have thought that all the trial is not on the side of the young ladies who evoke so much general sympathy. I have known governesses who always drew apart the moment visitors arrived, thereby purposely imparting a sense of their being lonely and neglected."

"Nobody would be that, with you," said Mrs. Raven, softly.

"And my wife and I have often despaired of getting a lady inmate for whom we should not have to exalt the tone of our own conversation," Mr. Connell observed, with a smile. "When Mrs. Connell was a novice, she used to be quite frightened at the learning of governesses, as set forth in some advertisements, and shrink at the thought of her own inferiority. We tried one, and found that to be accomplished is quite different from being cultivated; that an expert parser need not be an intelligent reader; and that one may be quite fluent concerning educational systems, yet seem to think that the human mind, when fairly set to work, has little else to grind except matters of dress and etiquette. I assure you it's true."

"My spirits fairly leaped up when I got Miss Cleare's answer to my advertisement," narrated Mrs. Connell. "Everything which she honestly told as her own disadvantages were all in her favour with me. Her father, though an Englishman, had been a professor in the poorest of Scotch universities. Her mother had been dead four or five years, and since then she had kept his house and taught her own two little sisters. They had somehow lost their very small private fortune; but by a great effort—I almost think with borrowed money—the only son was sent to Cambridge. Had he been able to complete his studies there, the family, it was hoped, might regain its lost prospects. But the professor himself died suddenly; and when the debts were paid there was scarcely a penny left for the children. So the young man had to leave college and take a situation as usher in a boys' school."

"And then she came straight to you?" said Mrs. Raven.

Mrs. Connell shook her head. "No," she answered. "She, too, got a situation in a boarding-school, where her little sisters could be with her—her services eking out the cost of their maintenance. And there they both died——"

"Oh, how sad!" sighed Mrs. Raven. "*Both* the children?"

"Alice says the one little sister pined away after her parents, and the other died in an epidemic which carried off the governess's own daughter. She stayed in the school till it was given up. That was when she came to me."

"Well," said Mrs. Raven, "it is to be hoped her brother will prosper in the world, and that life will so grow brighter for her. Though I am sure she is happy here—as she ought to be."

"But her brother is dead, is he not?" spoke Frank, his voice low.

"Yes, I was about to say so," Mrs. Connell replied. "I happened to make some remark about him when she first came here, and she answered, very quietly, that he also was with God. I can't think why she had not mentioned that in her letters before she came. Hearing it thus, it so shocked me, that I could not say another word. And I fancied she must deem me cold and unkind."

"But—I don't think he was dead then—when she corresponded with you," hesitated Frank. "You have heard, Aunt Connell, how I met her, not knowing who she was, when she had lost her way that night at Ravenstoke."

"To be sure I have, Frank. She told us all about that directly she heard you were our relative."

"I have not heard of this," struck in Mrs. Raven. Her tone was acid. For a moment she was her old, cold, arrogant self; and Frank could fancy he was back in the Raven house ten years ago, arrested for some childish misdemeanour, and already prejudged and condemned.

"It was nothing, mother; it was quite a chance," he began, but Mrs. Raven interrupted him.

"What was a chance? Be so good as to explain it to me." And Frank explained with a burning face.

"It was on my last night at home: I dined, if you remember, with Mr. Toynbee. After leaving him I took a moonlight saunter through the lanes: it was a very bright night. Suddenly I met a young lady, who stopped to accost me—and I saw it was the same young lady I had seen earlier in the day in the road, not far from the White Hart. She asked me the way to the inn——"

"When did she ask you?—which time?—be clear if you can, Frank," put in his mother.

"Oh, at night. I had only passed her in the day-time. She said she had been to Gerstowe, was later than she had thought to be, and had lost the path through being frightened by something: and so, I—I showed her the way to the White Hart. It was safer to do that than to direct her in that maze of green hedges. Besides, it was my own way home," concluded Frank, as if the matter required excuse, and in a sort of desperate haste to get it over, for the two players, having ceased their music, were turning round to listen now.

"Oh certainly you would not have done so had it been in a contrary direction," said the Rev. Mr. Connell, with a good-humoured laugh. "We quite understand that, Frank. Well?"

"Well, of course, I did not know her name then," Frank resumed. "I only heard that when I saw her here the other day. But she told me that evening she had to make her way on the morrow to a situation in the midland counties, and that her brother had just died in Gerstowe, at the school where he was tutor. She had been to see him, and had been with him at the last."

"Dear, dear, what a terrible ordeal she put herself through," cried Mrs. Connell, a mist in her own kind eyes. "I can understand why she did it, though. You remember, James, I was very urgent about her speedy coming, and she must have felt it was not her duty to risk the appointment."

"Do you not think she must have been rather hard-hearted to attempt to come at that time?" gratuitously put in Evelyn. "And very secretive to be able to do it?"

"As to that, I think we are all secretive in our own wills and ways," cried Philip, significantly, in answer. "The chief difference lies in this: do people have cause to think less of us, or more, when they find out our secrets!"

"And even that depends somewhat on the people, Philip," observed his father; "for the base will praise a man for cleverly concealing a crime, and would condemn him for not displaying a virtue."

Mrs. Connell had not spoken. Frank glanced across at her. Her head was bowed, the tears had gathered on her eyelashes. It was a pitiful tale. Poor Alice Cleare and her brother loved each other to



the end, and had not they gone together as far as they could? He had died doing his duty; she was persevering faithfully in hers.

But what of herself and her dead brother Henry?

Oh, ye who cry out in anguish as ye are rent asunder—ye know nothing of the mute agony of voluntary parting!

Mrs. Raven, detecting nothing of what was passing in people's minds, was the next to speak. "Frank," she said, "how had the young girl been frightened?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," said Frank, speaking lightly. "By the way, mother, I suppose you do not know of any neighbour of ours likely to wander abroad to frighten people in the moonlight ——"

"Don't be silly," interrupted Mrs. Raven.

"I am not silly; I am serious. A figure so shrouded in a long dark cloak that one cannot see who or what it is; whether old or young, man or woman, or ——" Frank stopped.

"Or what?" asked the minister.

"Or ghost, I was going to say, sir, but for the presence of ladies," continued Frank, with a laugh.

Mrs. Raven had turned deadly pale. She began to cough, holding her handkerchief up to hide her face. Evelyn Agate looked at Frank, and drew in her breath.

"What a queer description, child," said Mrs. Raven, recovering herself with a nervous titter. "Ghost, indeed!—what next? Where is this apparition to be seen, pray? I suppose you mean at Raven?"

"Yes," answered Frank, unconscious that the subject held special interest for anybody present. "It was a figure like this which had frightened Miss Cleare just before she met me. And when she told me of it I remembered that the servants always shrink from going through the warren after dusk, fearing they may meet the ghost. Perhaps you don't know much about this, mother?"

Evelyn was listening with breathless interest. Mrs. Raven concealed her agitation under a guise of severity and indifference. "Such tales were not likely to find much encouragement from me," she said coldly.

"But it would be a curious confirmation of them, if a stranger, who knew nothing of their existence, saw something corresponding to the account the servants give. Don't you perceive that, mother?"

"Weakminded people are apt to clothe everything they cannot distinctly see with mystery," said Evelyn, "and however bright the moon was that night, moonlight is not daylight."

"Miss Cleare never hinted at its being anything supernatural," Frank retorted hotly, piqued by the girl's scoff at Alice.

"But surely you don't believe it was a ghost," cried Mr. Connell.

"Dear me, no, sir," answered Frank, surprised by the mere question.

"The warren is certainly a lonely and dismal place," remarked Mrs. Raven; "that is the way you went back to the village on the evening when I lost my purse, Miss Evelyn. No harm came to you. I suppose you saw nothing?" she added, with a forced laugh.

Evelyn lightly echoed it. "I passed nobody all the way between the Court gate and the village lane," she said, keeping truth to the letter while thoroughly false to its spirit. "If any ghost passed me, it put on its invisible cap, and I hope I did not frighten it."

"Well," said Mr. Connell, "it is quite refreshing to think that there is still a place in England where ghosts walk. We never hear of any about us—amid our railway stations and factories."

"Oh, we have always had them at Raven," laughed Frank: "apart from this figure — of which I have heard whispers from time to time all through my boyhood. There was the ghost that was heard to dig the child's grave in the churchyard."

"What nonsense is this?" flashed Mrs. Raven, angrily.

"Did you never know of that? Oh, surely you must, mother! It was always especially interesting to me, because it was heard on the very night I was born."

"What was heard? And who heard it?" inquired his mother. "You seem to have an extraordinary collection of legends, Frank."

"It was Budd's brother, the sexton," said Frank. "I suppose nobody ever liked to tell you the story. It ran, that he was asleep in his cottage; by the churchyard, you know; when he suddenly woke with a start and a shiver,—and heard a sound as of a grave being dug, which—"

"Was surely rather familiar to his ears," interpolated Mr. Connell, with a smile.

"But which, nevertheless, made his blood run cold," Frank went on, forcibly imitating the impressive and mysterious manner of the rustic folk from whom he had got the tale.

"Did he get up, and go on search?" asked Philip.

"No," said Frank, "he only awoke Mrs. Budd."

"Just like a man!" laughed Mrs. Connell.

"And I hope she had sense to tell him to go to sleep again," said her husband.

"On the contrary," Frank narrated, "the good woman instantly supplied an excuse and a possible reason for the strange sound, which she heard as well as he. 'That's a phantom grave-digger, William, and I hope we shan't have sad news from the Court to-morrow,' she said to her husband. 'I got a hint to-night there was likely to be one more of the family before morning. Heaven send that there may not, rather, be one less!' It was, I say, the night I was born."

"One can understand, then, how it was you never heard anything about this," whispered Mrs. Connell aside to her sister-in-law.

"And what was the end of it?" asked the minister.

"The end of it was that they lay still and listened," said Frank, "and after the ghost had had time to dig a grave——"

"Of which matter the sexton, of course, was a good judge," said Mr. Connell, with assumed gravity.

"Aye," assented Frank, "an especially good judge, as you may guess from this concluding detail, which was never omitted from the story. That he said to his wife, as the sounds ceased: 'Maria, our lady herself up at the Court, is all right. It's the poor baby that's took. For that's only a child's grave that's been dug.'"

"See the beauty of having an expert for a witness!" cried Philip.

"Before breakfast, next morning," Frank went on, "the sexton went up to the Court to speak to his brother, our butler, good old Budd. He got Budd into the garden, and gave him the dreadful tidings, all downcast; when our Budd, who is a sensible man, had heard him out, he spoilt the point of his story, by telling him that the baby had come and was particularly alive and flourishing, and the mistress too. And the old sexton declares to this day, he can't make out why that phantom grave should have been dug."

"It must be hard to get a good ghost-story spoiled!" laughed the minister.

"To return to what we were talking of," said Frank: "Miss Cleare had not the faintest idea that what she saw was ghostly. She thought it only some person, prowling mysteriously, for no good end. Her account of it was distinct enough. It had passed her in a narrow lane, between a stile and a round shed—— which must have been Ash Lane. That which leads to Eldred Sloam's cottage, you know, mother."

At sound of that name, Mrs. Raven remembered her own intervention in that man's favour, and the mysterious reason she had had for it, and all that happened since. As she sat there, still and stately, she trembled in spite of herself.

"Eldred Sloam!" exclaimed Evelyn, who had been listening with deep attention, "Eldred Sloam! where have I heard that name? O, yes: it was the man you and I met at the Lodge-gates, Mrs. Raven, on the evening of our last walk to the village. And I remembered then, that I had heard you, Mr. Frank, speak of him once at Aunt Gertrude's."

"Frank could not tell you much good about Eldred Sloam?" exclaimed Mrs. Raven, frigid of manner, though her heart beat fast.

"I had remarked to him that Davies had given a bad character to some of the Raven people and called them black sheep," continued Evelyn. "Mr. Frank replied that Eldred Sloam was the blackest. Don't you recollect?" she added, rather impatiently turning to Frank, who seemed inclined to leave her to tell the story herself.

"I recollect it," put in Philip. "It was the night when Mary Davies slipped downstairs, and your Aunt Gertrude was inclined to blame you, mademoiselle, for having made her nervous."

"And pray, who is Mary Davies?" haughtily inquired Mrs. Raven. "And what was she nervous about?"

"Mary Davies," answered Evelyn and speaking with the sweetest deference, "is a many-years' servant in my London home. A faithful creature, I suppose, but troublesome. Because she attended upon me in my childhood, she thinks she has a right to love me as Aunt Gertrude does, and would have much liked to keep me at home for ever and a day. Stupid old thing!"

"And this Mary Davies, what can she know of Ravenstoke?" demanded Mrs. Raven again. The room seemed moving round her, but with a supreme effort she kept her presence of mind, feeling she might be within reach of some clue to matters that seemed to be ever eluding her.

"Simply nothing, madam," answered Evelyn. "When a girl she had lived in some village a few miles from it, and had visited Ravenstoke on one or two festive occasions of that period."

"Everybody one hears of seems to have visited Ravenstoke, or to know something about it," said Mrs. Raven, acidly. "I had no idea that such a tide of life could flow from so obscure a place."

"Ah, that's one of the mysteries of nature," observed Philip. "If I went and pitched my tent in the middle of the Great Desert, I should expect a Colburn man to call on me next morning. I've often felt as if there must be a law of gravitation among ourselves, as well as in the spheres, which holds us in a certain orbit."

"Which means simply that no man can escape from himself and his past," suggested his father. "The paths of life are less diverged than we are apt to think them, Philip, and ourselves less free.—Yes, I suppose it is about time to say good night," he added, as Mrs. Raven rose, looking very weary.

"I am tired," she confessed. "Miss Agate, my dear, will you kindly look in my room as you go up, and see that things are put as I like them?"

"We all seem fairly tired out," cried Philip, as he shook hands with the young lady, "and I shall be glad to escape to the land of dreams. May yours be sweet, Miss Evelyn! I hope you won't be haunted by any ghosts from the Cave!"

"I don't believe in ghosts," retorted Evelyn, with a fine scorn. "I leave that to Miss Cleare. You were not *with* her when she saw this wonderful figure, were you, Mr. Raven?"

"No," said Frank briefly.

"Ah," nodded Evelyn. "I remember, Mr. Philip, that she did not contradict you when you said she believed in the ghosts that two people did not see at the same time. That is a convenient sort of ghost to imagine—or invent! Good-night."

As Evelyn closed the door, she left a silence behind her. Mrs. Connell was the first to break it.

"I do not think it need be wondered at if Alice Cleare felt a little nervous after such an evening as she had spent. She had come from her dead brother when Frank met her."

"She didn't seem nervous at all," said Frank. "I would have trusted her opinion about anything—sad as she was."

"I think real sorrows and trials save the nerves from being shaken by fancies," observed Mr. Connell.

Mrs. Raven looked at Frank earnestly. "This story troubles me," she said, clearing her throat. "I have heard of the foolish talk that obtains among the Ravenscourt servants concerning such a figure. When this tale reaches them, it will, of course, become a veritable ghost at once."

"Probably it was nothing more than some eccentric stranger lodging at an outlying farmhouse," observed Mr. Connell, who had put on a cloak for warmth. "An out-of-the-way figure seen at a weird time, or under some coincident circumstance, is very apt to be drawn into the region of the supernatural."

"But," insisted Frank, "Miss Cleare never for a moment imagined it to be a ghost; I feel quite certain of that. She only thought it to be someone, either man or woman, who might have come abroad disguised for some sinister purpose."

"Was not that an uncharitable judgment to form so hastily?" demanded Mrs. Raven. Like Evelyn, she had caught up an antipathy for this unknown girl, Alice Cleare: or, possibly, to the girl's honest, straightforward nature.

"Not at all, mother," said Frank, rather warmly. "But the word, sinister, was mine, not hers. None of us can help the impressions we receive. She knew she felt frightened: that was all."

Upon that they all separated. As Mr. and Mrs. Connell passed the door of Alice Cleare's room towards their own, a faint stream of light issuing from the keyhole showed that the governess had not yet retired to rest.

Mrs. Connell paused. "I think I must go in and speak a word to her," said that kindly lady. "I should like to, after what I have heard to-night about all that happened before she came here."

"Do so then, Millicent," assented the minister, cheerfully.

Mrs. Connell found Alice writing. The girl rose with an exclamation, and an apology that she had not noticed the lateness of the hour. Her little pupils, who shared her room, were sleeping soundly. Alice looked alarmed, and Mrs. Connell thought she must have startled her. But the anxious look lingered, and even deepened as the good woman put her hand kindly on the girl's shoulder, and paused for a moment.

"What you must have borne, my dear!" she said. "Frank has



been telling us of the great sorrow that had fallen upon you that past evening when he met you at Raven."

Alice gasped out, "Oh!" with a prolonged breath, and looked up. The scared expression had gone from her face. She had feared some question about the Cave expedition.

"How could you do what you did!" Mrs. Connell went on. "How brave you were! How you must have loved that brother!"

The girl was crying now. "Oh, thank you for saying that," she said. "I always fancied if people knew, they might think quite otherwise."

"Great love and great courage go together," cried Mrs. Connell. "Only it was so terribly hard that you should not see your brother laid at rest in his grave, after you had seen him die."

"It was hard," confessed Alice, quietly; "but, then, many things are hard." She was thinking that it would have been harder still to have left strangers to pay for his last needs and his lowly grave. Performing that duty had utterly emptied her purse. She had not even had a coin over to buy fresh mourning for herself: that which had been worn for her last sister had been made to serve. Now that she had received one instalment of salary from Mrs. Connell, she had begun the world again. Nobody suspected all this, for she had been silent.

Mrs. Connell asked some particulars, and the two sat and talked long together, unmindful of the lapse of time. Alice told how good her brother had been, and how clever, and narrated little incidents of their happy years in the bleak North town, and how thoughtful and kind he had been to his sisters in the first days of their orphanhood. The past, which, only pondered over in utter silence, had been growing like a strange dream, became once more vivid and real, and though Alice wept more than she had ever wept in the lonely vigils sometimes kept in her quiet room, she felt her tears refreshed her like the "growing weather" of spring. It was so refreshing to pour out this confidence. In the midst of it, the staircase clock struck midnight.

Mrs. Connell started up. "Now whatever will my husband think has become of me!"

She stole yet a moment to step softly to her children's bedside before she went away; while Alice Cleare turned to the window to take a parting look at the night.

As she opened the curtains, a silver stream of moonlight flooded the room. Mrs. Connell gently kissed her sleeping children, left them, and paused beside Alice.

The atmosphere of that neighbourhood was clearer by night than by day. The great old trees in the garden and the turf of the small lawn did not show the strangely shabby appearance which they did—to country eyes at least—by daylight. The two ladies stood, gazing out in silence.

Suddenly, something seemed to stir in the picture before them. There came a long shadow on the grass. Each felt the other give the involuntary movement of watching. From under the great trees, out upon the little clearing of the lawn, stepped a gliding figure.

A tall figure, with some dark covering on its head, and with its body draped from shoulders to ankles in a long black cloak.

Alice Cleare clutched Mrs. Connell's arm. She thought she had seen this figure once before; and a nameless, breathless terror began to steal over her.

The apparition—if it was one—came slowly across the grass towards the house. Suddenly, it paused and raised its head, as if to look at the windows; but the moon was behind it, and the face lay in deep shadow. But surely it was very white—and what was the deep red mark that showed beneath the ear? Did it see them, standing there? Somehow, indistinct as the face was, it did not seem fairly turned upon theirs. All at once it stretched forth its right arm, and held it high, and shook its clenched fist threateningly.

Suddenly the unseen eyes seemed to meet theirs. Did the figure start? Certainly, it turned and sped away through the shrubbery.

"I have seen that before—I think I have," gasped Alice, still clinging to Mrs. Connell, as they watched its retreat. "What can it be? What can it mean?"

"But where did you see it, child?"

"I saw that same figure—yes, I am sure it is the same—pass me in the Raven lanes on the night I met your nephew. It frightened me sadly: I don't know why: but I could not forget it. What can it mean, Mrs. Connell?"

But before she had finished whispering this, while they were yet clinging breathlessly together, and all else was as still as death, a piercing shriek rang out from somewhere in the house, awaking its echoes and its terrors.

*(To be continued.)*



## ON THE NIGHT OF THE STORM.

BY MARY E. PENN.

## I.

"ONCE for all, Brigitta, I will not marry Count Baldassare! Rather would I take the veil, or die an old maid. If he has asked you to be his advocate you may give him that answer, with my compliments."

Having so expressed herself, the speaker turned from her companion, and crossed to the arched opening of the vaulted loggia in front of the house, where she stood, like a bright picture in a sombre frame, looking out over the rich Tuscan landscape.

The waning sunshine of a sultry September afternoon lay in long shafts of light across a broad fertile slope, covered with golden fields of maize and corn, grey olive woods, and vineyards where the grapes were ripening under the yellow leaves. All that sunny hillside, with its vines and fields, up to the ridge of stone-pines, dark against the sky, was her own; as well as the rich meadows by the stream, and the old grey farmhouse with its flat roof and open galleries, which had sheltered her people from time immemorial.

She, Teresa Guercino, was the last of the old stock—for the cousin who managed her house was no blood relation—and absolute mistress of herself and her possessions. A tall, stately girl of one-and-twenty, with a skin which the sun had kissed; eyes dark as night and soft as velvet, under level brows; and full red lips, which told of a generous, but passionate and undisciplined nature. Her companion, a little shrivelled elderly woman, with a hooked nose and bead-like black eyes, in the dress of a well-to-do contadina, sat knitting within the loggia.

"Do you mean that?" she asked shrilly, looking up for a moment from her twinkling needles.

"I think you know that I generally mean what I say, cousin."

"I know that you are perverse enough to anger a saint," answered the cousin pettishly, as she changed the pins. "What have you against the man—tell me that?"

"Nothing—except that I detest him."

"Detest? pooh! a woman's hate is only love turned inside out, as the proverb says. It would all come straight after marriage. He is passionately fond of you; he is rich; he can give you a title——"

"A brand new one too, with the gloss upon it!" Teresa put in, with a slighting laugh. "It has only been in the family one lifetime. These Baldassari, whose alliance you think such an honour, are parvenus of yesterday, nothing more. We were masters here on our own land when they were little better than serfs."

"They have the best of it now, anyhow. Much of your land has passed to them, thanks to your father's mismanagement. If you married the count you would get it back," was the prompt suggestion. Teresa laughed.

"No; he would get what remains—and that he never shall! Say no more, Brigitta, unless you wish to quarrel with me. I will take your advice on any other subject, but I mean to choose my husband for myself."

"And a fine choice you will make," the housekeeper returned drily, as she rolled up her knitting and put it in her pocket. "Ah, you may look; I know what I know. Ahimé! 'tis a crooked world!" She rose as she spoke, and pushed back her chair with a grating sound that made her companion start.

"Santa Maria, what a noise!" the girl exclaimed impatiently; "you will wake little Angelo; he is asleep in the sala."

Brigitta, who was turning to enter the house, paused and looked at her. "So! you have got the steward's brat here again? Humph! Meraldi should be grateful to you. It is not every mistress who would put herself out of the way for her servant's child."

"Meraldi is no more my servant than you are," the girl retorted, with a heightened colour, "and you seem to forget that, like yourself, he is my relation —"

"Your connection by marriage, no more," the housekeeper corrected quickly. "His late wife was your cousin —"

"And my dearest friend. It would be strange indeed if I took no interest in poor Angela's only child."

"So that your tender interest in the child doesn't extend to the father, I have nothing more to say."

"And if it does?" Teresa rejoined, turning upon her suddenly, flushed and defiant. "Listen—you shall know my mind once for all. I will be Meraldi's wife if he asks me—if he does not, I will be no other man's."

"Then, mia bella, I fear you will 'coiffe Sainte Catherine,'" retorted Brigitta, with a series of little short dry nods. "Meraldi has no eyes or heart for anyone but his child."

Having launched this shaft, she trotted off into the house. Teresa stood for a moment, leaning against the stone pillar, then, taking up her broad Leghorn hat, she descended the steps that led from the southern loggia into the garden.

In times gone by, the building which was now a farmhouse had been a Carthusian monastery. Traces of faded frescoes still lingered on the walls of its great bare echoing rooms; the chapel was in ruins, and the cloisters had been converted into stables, but the garden remained very much as the old monks had left it—such a garden as Fra Angelico might have painted for a background to one of his sweet saintly pictures. It was in true Italian taste, at once formal and picturesque; green even in winter, with its ilex and arbutus,

laurel and cypress, and, from early spring to late autumn, a perfect paradise of flowers—roses, magnolias, oleanders, myrtles, camellias, and a hundred nameless blooms, all flourishing at their own sweet will.

A vine-grown wall enclosed it, low on the inner side, but high towards the road, which was on a different level. The house stood on the southern slope of a valley, through which a wilful little stream hurried over its rocky bed to join the river Serchio.

The summit of the opposite hillside was crowned by a grey mediæval tower, which was all that remained of a strong fortress that in feudal times had frowned upon the valley at its feet. The tower stood on Count Baldassare's land, which was divided from Teresa's by a rough low stone wall.

Lower down on the slope, gleaming white out of a sea of vines, was the cottage occupied by her farm-bailiff, Antonio Meraldi.

She leaned on the garden wall, under the shadow of a bignonia tree, looking, with a moody dissatisfied face, across the sunny hillside towards the steward's house.

She was standing thus, "half light, half shade," when the sound of a horse approaching made her look down towards the road. It was Count Baldassare. He was a slight, somewhat foppishly dressed young fellow of five-and-twenty, looking older than his years; with a thin, dark, mobile face, and restless glittering black eyes, that had a smouldering fire in them. His features were regular, but there was something vaguely repellent in their expression, even when he smiled, as he did now, looking up at her with uncovered head.

"I owe the saints a candle for this chance," he said. "It is almost a miracle to find you alone. May I come in?"

Without waiting for her permission, he dismounted, tied his horse to a ring in the wall, and ascended the steps to the garden gate, which she reluctantly opened to admit him.

"Excuse me for intruding," he began, looking at her with a curious mixture of admiration and defiance: "your face tells me that I am an unwelcome visitor. What would you, Teresa? The attraction that draws me here is stronger than my will."

"Your will must be a weak one, signor Conte," was her comment.

He glanced at her with a curious smile. "You think so? You do not know me. You will learn some day that no obstacles deter me from my purpose, and that what I covet I always win in the long run."

"Unless you happen to encounter a will as strong as your own," she answered, looking him full in the face for a moment, and then turning from his side.

"What—you are going?" he exclaimed. "Am I so hateful to you that you cannot endure my presence for five minutes? Have all my patience and devotion been thrown away!—Have you no heart, Teresa?"



"Yes," she answered quietly, "I have a heart—but it is beyond your reach."

He drew in his breath quickly. "Does that mean that it is given to another?" he demanded, with jealous suspicion.

She coloured, and turned from him without replying. He caught her wrist and detained her. His face was white, and there was a fierce gleam in his eyes that startled her.

"Who is it? tell me his name ——"

"Have you lost your senses?" she cried. "Let go my hand ——"

He paid no more heed than if she had not spoken.

"Perhaps I can guess," he continued, bending to look into her face. "I have heard it whispered that the handsome steward of San Giovanni could be master of the farm and its mistress if he chose, but ——"

She tore her hand from his grasp, crimsoning to the temples. "How dare you!" she panted, breathless with indignation.

"Ah, I see—it is true," he commented, with a bitter smile. "Your face speaks for you. So the proud heart that is 'beyond my reach' lies at your servant's feet? and he ——"

He broke off abruptly, glancing over his shoulder towards the road, whence there came the sound of a mellow baritone voice, singing a Tuscan "rispetto." The next moment the garden-gate opened and swung to, admitting the very person whose name had just been mentioned—Antonio Meraldi.

The steward was a strikingly handsome man, still in the prime of life, though not in his first youth; with an olive-tinted oval face, somewhat melancholy in repose, broad, calm, honest dark eyes, a tall lithe figure, and a small head well set on a pair of muscular shoulders. By the side of the young Count, with his foppish dress and neat little waxed moustache, he looked like a prince in disguise.

He glanced with a shade of surprise at Baldassare, but lifted his hat to him—a courtesy which was only acknowledged by an insolent stare—then turned to his young mistress.

"I am going up to the house, signorina, to fetch Angelo," he said, and was passing on, but she called him back.

"Stay for me; Signor Baldassare is going now."

"Pardon me," the latter interposed, "I have something more to say to you before I take my leave."

"I will not listen to another word," she flashed out angrily; "you shall not insult me twice."

Meraldi started. "What—you have been insulted?" he exclaimed, taking a step towards the visitor, with a dangerous glitter in his dark eyes.

Teresa hastily put herself between the two men. "Antonio, I forbid you to interfere."

"Then let this gentleman take himself out of my reach," he said significantly, pointing to the gate.

The young man looked him over with a sneering laugh, twisting his moustache with unsteady fingers. "At your bidding? Basta! not I. You are not master here yet, my good fellow, though it seems that your mistress would ——"

The sentence was never finished. Before he knew what the steward intended, he found himself seized in a grasp of iron, lifted over the low wall with as much ease as if he had been a child, and dropped neatly into the dusty road outside. Having executed this summary ejection, without the least appearance of heat or hurry, Meraldi leaned on the wall, looking down on him composedly.

"You might as well have gone through the gate, signor Conte," was his remark. The other turned and gave him a look of concentrated hatred that made Teresa shudder.

"You shall pay me for this," he panted, under his breath; "there will be a reckoning between us some day, and then you shall pay me with interest."

"You should not have interfered," were Teresa's first words when they were alone; "you have made him your enemy for life. He is dangerous. Did you notice the look he gave you just now?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. "He is more than half mad, I believe, at times. They say he has been drinking hard lately—keeps a secret store at the old tower. By the way, did you know he had taken to sleeping there lately?"

She stopped short in her walk and looked at him. "At the tower? why, it is a ruin!"

"The upper part is, but the basement is solid enough. Anyhow, it is a favourite haunt of his. I see him going past, up the hill-road, nearly every evening, between sundown and moon-rise."

Teresa shivered uncomfortably. "I wish you had not told me. I hate for him to be so near. I believe he has the evil eye."

"I dare say he would do me an ill turn if he could," pursued the steward, "though I hardly know how he would set about it. I have nothing to lose—except your friendship: and I hope he will never rob me of that," he added, laying his hand on hers for a moment.

Her face flushed and softened, she glanced up at him half wistfully, but meeting his frank, unembarrassed smile, looked away again.

"Of course his enmity will not make me less your friend," she answered carelessly, as she led the way into the house.

They passed through an open glass door into a cool spacious shadowy room, with antique furniture, and walls flecked with dim rich colours. Meraldi took off his hat and looked round, shaking back his thick dark hair with a gesture that was habitual to him.

"How pleasant it is here, after the heat and glare outside!"

"Sit down, and I will get you a cup of wine," she said, pushing a chair towards him.

"Excuse me—I must not stay. I only looked in to fetch Angelo. Is he better? he has been in my thoughts all day."

"He is asleep; come and look at him."

She preceded him to the upper end of the room, where there was an alcove, in which the abbot's chair of state once stood. It contained now a heavy carved couch, covered with faded amber damask, on which little Angelo—a pretty, fragile-looking boy of four or five years old—lay, fast asleep. Meraldi bent over the child, watching him with anxious tenderness, oblivious for the moment of his companion, who stood in the shadow behind.

"Angiol mio! He grows more like her every day," she heard him murmur; and she knew that he was thinking of his dead wife. The girl's heart contracted with a thrill of jealous pain; her face flushed and paled; her fingers nervously twisted the silver beads at her throat. Had he looked up then, he might have learnt a secret he was far from suspecting at present, but when he turned towards her the expression had passed away.

"It seems almost a pity to wake him," he whispered.

"You need not. Leave him here for to-night, and I will bring him back myself to-morrow evening."

"Will you? benissimo! It is a long time since you honoured me with a visit."

"I suppose you have almost finished reaping, on the slope?" she said, as she followed him to the door.

"We shall finish to-morrow I hope, if the weather holds up. It has been a glorious harvest, and the vintage promises finely. Everything prospers with you as usual."

"You have brought me luck," she said, with a faint smile.

He lifted his shoulders and laughed, somewhat ruefully, as he took up his sunburnt straw hat.

"Have I? then I have brought you what I never found myself, cara Padrona, or I should be my own master now, instead of your prime minister."

Teresa stood and watched him as he passed through the fragrant garden alleys.

"This must end, I cannot bear it," she muttered. "I shall get to despise myself, or to hate him. I must send him away, though it break my heart. Oh, I am a fool!"

She angrily dashed from her eyes the tears that had gathered in spite of her, and turned indoors.

## II.

THE shadows were lengthening on the following afternoon when Teresa, leading little Angelo by the hand, crossed the flat timber bridge over the stream, and passing through a little wood of ilex-trees whose twisted stems were bearded with long silvery moss, ascended the rough road which wound up the hillside. The reapers were

leaving work, and she met throngs of merry contadini coming down from the harvest fields; and clumsy carts laden with yellow sheaves, and drawn by great dove-coloured oxen, with mighty horns, and grand dark eyes.

As they turned a curve in the steep road, Meraldi's voice hailed them from above. He had seen them approaching, and came to meet them, waving his hat. Angelo bounded forwards, and was promptly swung up on to his father's shoulder.

"How good of you to come," was the latter's greeting, as he walked on at her side, holding the boy on his perch with one hand. "I feared you might change your mind, and send one of the maids. But the walk has tired you—you look pale."

"My head aches. There is thunder in the air," replied Teresa.

"That sky threatens a storm before night," he rejoined, nodding towards the west, where the sun was sinking in a blaze of lurid splendour. "Luckily, most of the wheat is carried," he added, setting the child on his feet as they reached the little house among the vines.

It was a low, white-walled building of one storey, with little deep-set casements, and a pink-tiled roof shaded by an old walnut tree. She looked about her disparagingly. "You are lodged like a peasant. You should have had the other house by the river."

"This is well enough—and look at the view! I can almost see the domes of Florence, far away, and at sun-rise the mountains yonder look as Dante described the hills of Paradise—'like sun-illuminated gold.'"

She took her seat on the bench under the walnut tree, and glanced over the wide rich landscape, set, as in a frame, by the purple peaks of the majestic, melancholy Apennines. In the valley below, where the old house nestled among its sheltering woods, twilight was already gathering, and a white mist clung, ghost-like, to the stream, but the slopes above were bathed in sunset light, and the tawny white sheaves cast long shadows upwards over the stubble. The cicale chirped among the vines; the swallows chased each other with shrill cries, skimming round and over the cottage roof; the bell of a little church hidden among chestnut woods in the valley was ringing for Benediction.

It was all sweet, pensive, and peaceful, save for the threat of coming storm.

"From this point you can take in all your possessions at a glance," said the steward, who had installed himself on an overturned lemon pot opposite to her, with the boy between his knees. "It is a fair inheritance."

"Too much for a single woman, as my cousin often tells me."

"Some day you will give it a master," he said with a grave smile, stroking Angelo's curls, "though I am selfish enough to hope that day may be distant."

"What difference will it make to you?" she asked, turning her eyes upon him for a moment and looking away again.

"Well—when that event happens, I suppose I must strike my tent. You will scarcely need a steward when you have a husband to look after your interests."

"True," she acquiesced briefly, and was silent a moment.

"Should you be sorry to leave the farm?" she asked, after a pause, examining the veins of a fallen leaf.

He looked at her half reproachfully. "What a question! Where else shall I meet with such a home as I have had here, and such a friend as I have found in you? I owe you more than I can ever repay, Teresa."

She shook her head with a dubious smile. He did not see how her lips quivered, nor how her bodice heaved with the painful beating of her heart.

"Shall I prophesy your future as you do mine?" she asked lightly. "You will have a home of your own again some day, and—a wife."

He shook his head, looking away towards the mountains.

"I shall never marry again. I might if I were alone in the world; I should feel the need of some one to love. But as it is—I have my child; he is enough for me." And drawing the little fellow closer to him, he laid his bearded cheek on the fair curly head.

Her face changed, every trace of softness leaving it.

"The child—always the child!" she exclaimed, with a forced laugh; "as if there was nothing else in the world worth living for; as if——"

She checked herself abruptly, colouring to the temples. She dared not look at him; she knew that he was watching her perplexedly, and she feared he might read the secret in her eyes. At that moment she almost felt as if her love had turned to hatred. A great wave of anger rushed into her heart, filling it with pain and bitterness, then retreated, leaving her icily calm.

"You are a model father," she said, with the same discordant laugh; "it is to be hoped that Angelo will repay you for your devotion. But, to return to what we were discussing just now. I have no present intention of marrying, but it may be necessary for us to part, notwithstanding."

He started and looked at her as if he doubted whether he had heard correctly.

"Do you mean that you wish me to leave the farm?"

"I do not wish it, but it must be. I came here this afternoon with the intention of telling you so."

He looked at her in silence. His eyes were troubled and perplexed. "Have I offended you, Teresa?" he asked gently, at last. She averted her head.

"No."

"Then why do you send me away?"



"Because—because I find that gossip has been busy with our names."

He frowned. "Baldassare told you so, I suppose? I do not believe it, but even if it were true, need you care for the cackle of idle tongues? No one who knows you would misinterpret your generous friendship for me."

She gave him a curious glance. "No," she acquiesced slowly. "I suppose few people who know me would believe that I could wish to make my servant my master."

The words brought the blood to his olive cheek. He bit his lip, and looked away, more hurt than he would have cared to acknowledge. Never before had she made him feel his position; till that moment he had been her friend and equal. Now, all at once, a gulf opened between them. His heart sank with a sense of isolation and loss—and some other feeling which he could hardly define.

But pride came to his aid, and it was in a tone almost as cold as her own that he replied: "Perhaps you are right: it will be better for us to part. You will wish me to stay till you meet with a successor?"

"No—I shall dispense with a steward for the present," she said, rising.

"I will bring the books to-morrow evening and go over them with you."

"It is not necessary. You can send them. Good-bye."

"Teresa!" he exclaimed, in a tone of pain that went to her heart, "this is not to be our parting? You dismiss me without a word of regret—I, who have been your faithful friend and servant so long"—and his voice faltered. "What has come between us?" he added, taking her hand; "there is something more than you have told me."

"Let me go," she said, in a choked voice, turning her head aside.

"Tell me," he persisted; "do not let a misunderstanding part us. Is it anything I have done——"

"No, no, you are not to blame. Think what you like of me, but don't question me. Good-bye!" She snatched her hand from his and turned away. She felt that if she spoke another word she should break down altogether. Her throat ached with the effort to keep back her tears.

Little Angelo, struggling from his father's arms, ran and clung to her dress. "Tessa, take me with thee!"

"No, you must not come," she said, disengaging her skirt almost roughly. Then, as the child looked at her in wistful surprise, with a sudden revulsion of feeling she bent and kissed him again and again.

"Go back, carino, I cannot take thee now," she said gently.

But Angelo declined to be separated from her by anything short of force, and finally was carried off into the house by his old nurse wailing for "Tessa!"

Meraldi stood with folded arms, watching the girl's retreating figure as it passed from the sunlight of the slope into the mist and gloom of the valley. A dim perception of the truth was dawning upon his mind, though at first he refused to believe it. But conviction was forced upon him. Words, looks, and tones which he had hardly noticed at the time, returned to him all at once with the force of accumulated testimony. Teresa loved him.

The discovery almost took his breath away, and yet he wondered now that he had not made it before. "How blind I have been! If only I had known! And if I had, what then? I have no love to offer her in return. It is buried in Angela's grave."

He sat down on the bench under the walnut tree, covering his eyes with his hand. But when he would have conjured up the fair face of his dead wife, another face rose unbidden before him, and a pair of dark pleading eyes looked into his. He thrilled in all his veins, and his heart swelled with a feeling to which he could hardly give a title, but which was dangerously sweet.

Meanwhile, little Angelo had escaped from purblind old Lotta's surveillance and stolen out into the garden. Finding his father too absorbed in thought to notice him, he crept towards the gate, and after one or two backward glances, to make sure that his proceedings were unobserved, trotted off in pursuit of Teresa—a little flying figure, with the sunset glory on his curls, hurrying down through the vines and the wheat as fast as his feet would carry him. When Meraldi raised his head the child was out of sight. Old Lotta missed him presently, but was not concerned, taking it for granted he was with his father.

At length the steward roused himself with a sigh, and changed his position. Lighting a cigarette he sat smoking and looking down into the valley; while twilight deepened into night, and beyond Carrara the coming storm brooded and muttered.

An hour passed away. Darkness had gathered round the old farmhouse in the valley. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees, or shook the leaves from the pale autumn roses, and the only sound that broke the sultry silence was the restless murmur of the stream as it chafed over its rocky bed. Nature seemed to hold her breath in fear.

The farm-servants were at supper in the great bare kitchen—once the convent refectory—which was dimly lighted by bronze oil-lamps, suspended by chains from the vaulted ceiling. There was a mixed smell of wine and garlic and polenta, a cheerful buzz of voices and clink of glasses. Brigitta moved about, superintending the repast, her fingers mechanically busy with her knitting, while her keen eyes were everywhere, and her shrill tongue was seldom silent.

"Cielo! how black it is," she muttered, standing at the wide-arched entrance which opened on a courtyard, stored with piles of faggots, wine-vats, and oil-presses. "The storm that is coming will be the

worst we have had this year. It—— who is that ?” she broke off, as a man’s figure loomed out of the darkness.

“It is I—Meraldi,” the steward’s voice replied, and he entered, looking hot and breathless, as if he had been running. “Is Angelo here?”

“Angelo? My cousin took him back to the cottage this afternoon.”

“She brought him, yes; but we thought he must have followed her home again. He is nowhere to be found.”

“He is not here, that’s certain. Teresa returned without him more than an hour ago. She has gone to bed with a headache.”

He stared at her in dismay. “What has become of him then? Where is he?” he exclaimed.

There was a pause. The men looked up from their supper, interested and sympathetic.

“Perhaps the bambino has fallen into the stream—it runs deep by the bridge,” one of them suggested in an undertone.

The steward put both hands to his broad chest, drawing a deep breath, as if in pain.

“It is more likely that he has wandered among the vines and got lost,” put in Brigitta, hastily.

“In that case, mistress, the sooner he is found the better,” said a stalwart young contadino in a striped shirt, as he threw down his knife and swung himself off the bench. “This is not a night for a man to be abroad, much less a child.”

His example was at once followed by the others, and after a short delay, while lanterns were found and lighted, they set forth, headed by Meraldi, just as the storm broke. Not long afterwards Teresa made her appearance in the kitchen, startling her cousin, who supposed her to have retired for the night.

“Where are the men?” she asked. “I heard them go out just now.”

“They are gone in search of the fattore’s boy. He is lost.”

“Lost! little Angelo? I left him safe at home.”

“Yes, but he was missed afterwards, and they think he may have lost his way in attempting to follow you. By-the-bye,” she added, “Count Baldassare may have seen him. He went up the hill just after you returned. Monica saw him.”

“Yes,” one of the maids assented; “he passed me on the bridge a few minutes after you came home, signorina. If the little lad was coming down the hill-road, he must have met him; though it is strange he did not——”

Teresa interrupted her. She had turned very white, and there was a look of dread anxiety on her face. “Get me a lantern, Monica,” she said, abruptly.

“Madonna mia! you are not going out?” her cousin exclaimed, while the girl stared at her without moving.

"A lantern—quick! do you hear?" she repeated, in a tone which admitted of no delay. When it was brought she lighted it at one of the lamps, then, disregarding Brigitta's inquiries and expostulations, she hurried from the house.

As she crossed the bridge she heard the voices of the men, who were searching the banks of the stream, and midway in the dark ilex-wood beyond she encountered Luigi, the young contadino who had first volunteered for the search.

"Padrona—it is you!" he exclaimed, raising his lantern to her face; "you should not be out in this storm."

"I am going to the tower, to inquire if Count Baldassare has seen the child."

"Let me call the fattore; he will go with you——"

"No," she said, detaining him, "I would rather go alone, and you need not tell him you met me."

The storm increased every moment. So brief were the intervals of darkness that her lantern was hardly needed, the lightning showing her the white winding road before her, and the old tower, standing on the summit of the hill, like a sentinel forgotten at his post. She passed the cottage, where old Lotta was keeping anxious vigil, and making her way through a breach in the boundary wall which divided Baldassare's land from her own, mounted the steep slope to the ruin. The ground was strewn with old debris, overgrown with weeds and briars, and she stumbled more than once as she approached the tower, the entrance to which was by an iron-clamped, nail-studded door, deeply set in the massive wall. A faint light which gleamed from the narrow-barred casement showed that Baldassare was within, but the door was fast, and all was silent.

She raised her hand to knock, but let it fall again and hesitated. A sudden dread overcame her; she shrank from the thought of entering, and had half-turned, as if to retrace her steps, but at that moment a sound reached her from within, which banished her momentary hesitation and nerved her to meet any danger. It was the terrified cry of a child. Unconsciously she uttered an answering cry, and knocked with all her force, but the sound was lost in the uproar of the storm. She set down the lantern and groped about for a stone, with which she battered the door, calling upon Baldassare to admit her.

This time her summons was heard. There was a sound as of some heavy piece of furniture being dragged out of place, hurried footsteps, and the clang of a bolt withdrawn. Then the worm-eaten door creaked on its rusty hinges, and he stood before her, with a small oil-lamp in his hand—his face wild and white, his hair disordered, his breath coming quickly. She saw that he had been drinking heavily. Strangely enough, he expressed no surprise at seeing her.

"Ah—it is you," he said, with a curious smile. "I had a pre-

sentiment that you would come," and he drew back to allow her to pass in.

She found herself in a vaulted stone chamber, rounded to the shape of the tower, and containing no furniture but a small camp-bed, a couple of chairs, an antique oak "cassone," or chest, against the wall, and a table on which lay a gun.

One glance showed her these details, and it showed her also that Angelo was not there. She turned to Baldassare, who had followed her in and closed the door.

"Where is the child?"

He folded his arms, and leaned against the table, looking at her with a mocking composure which, somehow, seemed more ominous than violence. "He is here. I do not deny it. What then?"

"What then? You will give him up to me instantly. Where is he?" she asked, looking round. "Where have you hidden him? He—ah, cielo!" she broke off, setting down the lamp, "you have not——"

The words died on her lips.

"I have not murdered him, if that is what you mean," he finished, composedly. "He is safe enough—as yet. See for yourself."

He crossed the room, and dragging the chest away from the wall, disclosed a low, arched recess behind it, in which—dumb and paralysed with fear—little Angelo was crouching. At sight of Teresa the child uttered a breathless cry of joy, and sprang into her arms, clinging to her neck with the nervous force of terror, and hiding his face on her shoulder.

Without another word, without even a glance at Baldassare, she turned towards the door. He reached it before her, and set his back against it.

"Not yet," he said; "I have something to say to you."

"I will not listen to a word. Stand back—let me pass."

"Presently—on one condition."

"Condition? Do you suppose I will stay to make terms with you? Open that door, or I will cry for help, and bring those who will——"

Her words were drowned in a peal of thunder which shook the tower to its foundations.

"Cry for help, by all means," he resumed mockingly, when the sound died sullenly away. "Cry long and loud, and they may hear you—perhaps. But in the meantime you must listen to me, whether it pleases you or not."

She looked at him with a heaving bosom—too angry for the moment to feel afraid. "Speak, then—what is your 'condition.'"

After a moment's pause he came to her side. There was an expression on his face that made her shrink from him with mingled dread and loathing.

"Can you not guess, Teresa?" he questioned. He would have taken her hand, but she drew back, putting half the width of the tower between them, and, with a swift instinctive movement, snatched the long silver dagger from her dark hair.



"Come not a step nearer—I warn you!"

He laughed harshly.

"Excuse me. I forgot that my touch was contamination. You need not be alarmed, I will keep my distance. You may walk out of this place as freely as you came in, only"—he paused—"it must be as my promised wife."

"As your—you are mad!" she exclaimed. "You must know that not to save my life would I give you such a promise."

"But to save another's, perhaps?" he suggested, with a significant glance at the child.

She gazed at him blankly, her eyes dilating with horror, unconsciously folding her arms more closely round the boy, whose quick heart-beats throbbed against her bosom.

"You could not—you dare not!" was all she could say.

"Dare not? I dare anything now," he cried, with a wild laugh. "Do you not see that I am despairing and dangerous? Swear that you will be my wife—I will trust your oath—and you and the child shall pass out unmolested. Refuse—and as surely as you and I are standing face to face, Meraldi's boy shall never leave this place alive."

Looking into his eyes she realized that his words were no idle threat. For a moment she did not speak; only looked at him fixedly, feeling like one in an evil dream.

Outside there was a strange hush and lull, as if the storm, exhausted by its fury, were pausing to collect force for a fresh outburst. The sudden stillness had something ominous and threatening.

At length Teresa spoke again, facing him like an animal at bay.

"It would profit you little if I gave you that promise, for though I might stand at the altar with you, I would put the width of the world between us rather than spend a day beneath your roof."

His forced composure fell from him like a mask. His face turned livid, haggard, menacing. With a furious oath he caught up his gun from the table.

She drew back still further, putting the child behind her. She saw madness blazing in his eyes, and for a moment her heart failed her. But she faced him without flinching, never removing her eyes from his face, and, after a struggle, he seemed to command himself, and flung the gun upon the floor behind him.

"Promise me this, then," he said, in a hard, panting whisper, with his hand on her arm, and his face close to hers: "that if you will not be my wife, you will never be his—Meraldi's—while I live."

A faint dreary smile crossed her face. "I can safely promise that; I shall have no temptation to break my word."

"Swear it——"

"I swear it."

He kept his hand on her arm, looking up and down her face as if he were learning every feature by heart. His lips worked convulsively.

"Great heaven—how I love you!" he muttered brokenly, and before

she could prevent him, he threw his arms round her, and strained her to him in an embrace so fierce and passionate that it left her breathless. Then, suddenly relinquishing her, "Go, go," he said hoarsely, motioning her away, with averted head, "or I cannot answer for myself."

She waited for no second telling, but taking up Angelo again, opened the heavy door, and passed out into the gloom. She had moved only a few paces away when the darkness was rent by a flash which seemed to set earth and heaven on fire. Mingling with the uproar of the terrible peal that followed was another sound—a cracking, rending noise, which made her turn to look back at the building she had just quitted.

For a moment she saw its dark form looming above her, erect against the sky, then there was a crash of breaking timbers and falling stones, an avalanche of dust, and the old tower lay prostrate, burying three living creatures beneath its ruins.

### III.

For nearly an hour the men had been searching the hillside—among the wet and down-beaten vines, in the bare stubble fields, and up and down the banks of the stream, which, swollen by rain, rushed over the rocks with the sound of a mountain torrent.

"What was that noise?" the steward asked suddenly, in the pause after a deafening peal. "It sounded like the fall of a house."

"Per Bacco—it was the tower!" one of the men exclaimed. "I thought the old owl's nest would be down some stormy night. Luckily the Count is not there —"

"But yes—he is there!" cried Luigi, excitedly, "and—Dio buono!" he broke off, "the signorina —"

Meraldi turned towards him. "What do you mean? the mistress is not near the tower?"

"Yes—she went up to inquire if he had seen the boy. I met her in the wood half an hour ago. She told me to say nothing to you."

The steward stared at the speaker as if the sense of the words had not reached him. Then his face changed, as a sudden light burst on his mind. With a hoarse inarticulate cry he broke from his companions, and rushed up the steep road and across the slope to the spot where the tower had stood. A great formless heap of ruin, from which the dust was rising in clouds, was all that remained of the sturdy old building, which had resisted the shocks of centuries. He ran hither and thither distractedly calling "Angelo—Teresa!"

But there was "no voice, nor any that replied."

The storm, as if satisfied with the havoc it had worked, was now subsiding, the thunder dying away in deep sullen reverberations behind the mountains, though the rain still fell in torrents.

When the other men arrived they found the steward like one

stunned, gazing blankly at the ruins. He quickly roused himself, however, and despatched two of the men to the farm for spades and pickaxes. When these were brought they set to work with a will, lighted by pine torches, which cast a red flickering glare over the scene, giving it a strange air of unreality.

The women-servants, who had hurried up after the men, stood in a frightened group round Brigitta, who was mechanically muttering Aves and Paternosters, while the tears streamed down her brown wrinkled cheeks. Three hours passed thus; hours that were short to the workers, but long to the anxious watchers.

The rain had ceased, the air was cool and sweet, "like a breath from the innocent plains of Paradise," and the moon looked forth serenely from broken and dispersing clouds. It was close upon midnight, when there was a stir and murmur in the group which Meraldi was directing, then a sudden shout which brought the women hurrying to the spot. They had cleared away the débris above a great beam, which lay obliquely, one end wedged between fragments of masonry, while the other rested on the ground. In the hollow space thus formed, under the heap of ruin, lay Teresa and little Angelo—whether dead or living could not be told till, with infinite precaution, the heavy beam had been raised. It was soon ascertained that the child, though bruised and stunned, was not seriously hurt. He recovered consciousness almost immediately on being lifted out into the air, and clung to his father's neck with a cry that went to the hearts of all present.

But Teresa lay motionless, the blood trickling from a wound in her temple, and not the faintest sign of life in her white face and nerveless limbs.

Meraldi hastily set the boy on his feet, and knelt at her side, watching her face with agonized anxiety. White and inanimate in the moonlight, it looked like a beautiful mask. He lifted her head on to his knee, chafing her cold hand. "She is dead," he breathed, with a shudder that shook him from head to foot.

"No, she is only stunned," Brigitta assured him. "Look—she is coming to herself."

After a few moments, the girl's breast heaved in a long-drawn inspiration, her eyes unclosed and wandered round from face to face, vaguely at first, then with dawning recollection and intelligence.

She tried to raise herself. "Angelo?"

"He is safe—see," Brigitta replied, drawing the child forward. "What brought him up here is more than I can guess."

"I know," Meraldi muttered, with a sudden darkening of his face; "if my enemy lives he shall answer for it. Teresa," he added, bending his lips to her ear, "you risked your life to save my child, my own life shall show how I thank you;" and he passionately kissed the hand he held.

A faint colour flushed over her face, then faded again. "Thank

heaven I was in time," she whispered. "Baldassare is there—under the ruins. Try to save him—though he is—your enemy——"

Her voice failed, and her head sank heavily back upon his knee.

"We must take her home at once," Brigitta said anxiously, "or to your cottage, *fattore*; it is the nearest." He assented.

"Go on working, men; I will be back presently," he said, and, raising her figure in his strong arms, he bore her away, followed by Brigitta and the other women.

It was many hours before Teresa recovered consciousness, and then only to pass from insensibility to delirium. For weeks she lay, tossing on a troubled tide of fever which threatened to bear her away from love and life to the shores of the silent land. At length the cloud passed from her senses, and she woke, as from a long oppressive dream, to find herself in a place which was strange, yet vaguely familiar to her. A quaint little chamber, with a tiled floor and a ceiling crossed by old blackened beams; with one low square casement looking out over a green hillside and a sea of vines towards the distant mountains, which were bathed in the ineffable brightness of early morning. The window was open, admitting the cool-scented air, and a sound of chimes from some distant convent mingled with sweet rustic noises of tinkling oxen-bells, creaking waggons, and the voices of *contadini* passing by to their work among the dewy vines.

Curled up on the floor was little Angelo, playing a solitary game of "*morra*," and near the window sat Brigitta, severely upright, and knitting energetically.

Teresa raised herself among the pillows, and uttered her cousin's name. The latter dropped her pins with a hasty "*Santa Maria!*" and was at her side in a moment, while Angelo scrambled up on the bed.

"Do you know me, *carina*?" the housekeeper inquired.

The girl extended her hand with a smile.

"Of course I do, my good cousin," she said, faintly; "but I hardly know myself—I feel so weak and strange. This is not my room," she added, looking round.

"No, you are at the *fattore's* cottage: they brought you here that dreadful night——"

"Ah—I remember," the girl interrupted, with a shudder, covering her eyes with her hand. "Was Count Baldassare found—alive?" she asked after a moment, without looking up.

"Yes, he was alive. He—but you must not question me now. I will tell you more when you are better."

"He is alive—that is all I wish to know; please never mention his name to me again," she said quickly, a faint colour rising to her cheeks.

Her companion gave her a dubious glance, but said nothing.

"Where is Meraldi?" Teresa asked presently.

"Not far off, for certain. He has hardly left the house since you were ill, and he looks like a ghost himself. Certainly he has more feeling than I gave him credit for——"

A gentle tap at the door interrupted her.

"Is she conscious?" the steward's voice inquired. "I thought I heard her speaking."

"Let him come in," Teresa interposed, and he was admitted.

His cheeks were scarcely less white than her own, and his strong hand trembled like a leaf as he laid it on hers. He looked down at her, and tried to speak, but his voice failed him, his chest heaved convulsively. Suddenly he turned aside, and rested his arm against the wall, laying his forehead upon it.

"Do not," she said brokenly; "do not, Antonio." But the tears were running down her cheeks as she spoke.

After a moment he turned and looked at her again; at the lovely pallid face, with the subdued expression which gave it a new charm; at the great dark eyes which seemed almost too large for the wasted features. His hand closed on hers with a passionate pressure that almost hurt her.

"Heaven is merciful," he breathed; "it has given you back to us from the very gates of death. What should I have done if the fever had taken you!" She shook her head with a wistful smile.

"It would not have mattered—you would still have had Angelo," she said, laying her disengaged hand on the boy's fair curls.

Meraldi regarded her a moment without speaking. There was a look in his eyes she had never seen before; a look which sent a thrill of mingled joy and sadness to her heart.

"Ay—I should still have had my boy," he said at last, in his deep grave voice, "and once I told you that I needed no other love but his. But in the very hour I spoke those words I began to find out my mistake. Teresa, if you had been taken, the void in my life could never, never have been filled! Dear—I have been blind and insensible, but I know my own heart now, and if it is not too late——Why do you look at me so piteously?"

"It is too late," she breathed, in a voice scarcely audible.

"Carissima—you will not let pride stand between us?"

"Pride? ah no; pride cannot stand before the might of love——"

"You love me? then what need keep us apart?"

"My vow," she faltered; "the vow that was wrung from me that terrible night——"

"That night?" he interrupted; "ah, I begin to understand. Baldassare made you promise that you would never be my wife——"

"While he lived," she concluded.

He straightened his tall figure and looked at her with a sudden change of expression. "While he lived? then you do not know——"

She raised herself among the pillows, looking from him to her cousin.



"Brigitta told me he was living."

"He was alive when we found him, but injured beyond hope of recovery. He lived long enough to receive absolution, after making a confession, the substance of which you and I can guess. But for you, Teresa, I believe I should never have seen my child again."

"Do not let us think of it," she said, with a shudder.

"No," he agreed, "let it be forgotten like a bad dream. We can afford to forget the past—the present is so sweet, and the future——"

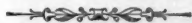
"The future?" she repeated, as he paused.

He bent and looked into her eyes with a tender, pleading smile.

"My future is in your hands," he whispered. "It rests with you to make it dark or sunny. My love—my dear heart, you will not send me away? You will let me stay—as your 'prime minister'?"

She put up her arms and drew his head still lower.

"No; stay—as my king," she whispered, and laid her lips to his.



#### A BIENTÔT.

FAREWELL, bright dawns and perfume-laden airs,

Faint with the breath of roses newly blown—

Warm slumbrous noons, when sleep our haunting cares,

Long summer days and nights, too swiftly flown.

With sighs and sad regrets we saw you go :

Why did you leave us, who had loved you so ?

'Neath sapphire skies, and starry hedgerows sweet,

Laced with gold threads of gossamer, we went,

Wild summer blooms beneath our wandering feet,

And summer in our hearts ; our love intent.

"I will return," you said "when roses blow,"

That time we said "good-bye," a year ago.

But I alone have seen them bloom and die,

While you have passed beyond these shadows here

Into the light. I'll follow by-and-bye.

Meantime I wait, and hold the roses dear,

And summer sacred, for the love I bear ;

Until we meet again, some day, somewhere.

E. L.

## IN THE BLACK FOREST.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"  
"ROUND ABOUT NORWAY," &c.



THE ALBETHAL.

I WAS at St. Blasien. I wished to see the Albthal and the Wehrthal, two valleys of the "highest consideration;" yet I had arranged to be at Schaffhausen on a given day. How was this to be done?

"There is nothing for it," said the amiable bookkeeper, "but to do those valleys, return here, and then go on to Schaffhausen."

Mistaken advice, followed for want of better knowledge; leading to much unnecessary trouble, and ending in a wildgoose chase after the picturesque. Furthermore, the hotel people consented to take charge

of a small portmanteau; having to return to St. Blasien in three or four days, it was unnecessary to drag it about the country. But, on returning, they demanded half price for a room for each day's absence. A mild protest against this extortion was received, metaphorically speaking, with the thunders of Jove; and, having a wholesome horror of tempests, weak submission was an inevitable consequence.

At two o'clock, one lovely afternoon, the diligence started for Albbrück. Remembering that, in the Black Forest, possession of the outside place forms the ten points of the law, I was on the spot twenty minutes before the time. There was but one outside seat on this vehicle besides the driver; or it might be two seats with a great deal of clever packing. It stood in the middle of the road, the horses, as yet, not put to. I took the seat, and became absorbed in a book; feeling, nevertheless, the cynosure of neighbouring and inquisitive eyes.

To the right the great dome reared its ponderous head ; the noise of the rattling machinery in the once beautiful and vast monastery might be heard like the rushing of distant waters ; the hills, with their green slopes or dark pine forests, rose on all sides ; clefts and passes opened up here and there, leading out into the world or yet further into the mountains. The sun distributed his rays with a dazzling heat that was fast converting this coveted outside seat into a fiery furnace. One counted the moments when we should be in motion, rising out of this "deep depression."

Ten minutes before the time, came strolling down the road three Germans. The world might have belonged to them ; the diligence at least they made sure of. When they saw the outside place already in possession of the enemy, nothing could equal their astonishment. They stood, and in a series of asides abused the world in general. That a mere Englishman should have the presumption to take the place they, Germans as they were, had marked out for themselves, was a crime beyond the pale of any Pope's indulgence.

One of the trio was so overcome that he brought out a huge flask of kirschwasser, holding about a pint, wherewith to drown their indignation, and using it too roughly, broke it in twain. Having reduced the contents by one-half, this was handed to the coachman (the horses were put to by this time and the courier was on his box), who disposed of the remainder so promptly that I trembled for our safety in passing precipices. With a few final sarcasms the three Germans entered the diligence, and we started. Their intention had been to pack themselves two on the box and one on the top.

Away, out of quaint, curious St. Blasien. If the earth has round corners this is one of them. Away, beside the running stream, past the benign figure of St. Blasius, in the act of administering a perpetual benediction upon a fountain. Sweeping round the road we were soon launched upon the Albthal. Blue skies and sunshine flooded our path. The rippling water and waving, rustling trees sang so sweet a song that it all aroused a delight beyond the power of words. I pitied the three Germans, and evidently they pitied themselves.

For, suddenly, there was an energetic tapping at the window. The diligence pulled up, and out stepped one of them. Next he managed to scramble on to the roof, and, disposing himself amongst the luggage like a bale of merchandize, settled down into a broad, visible contentment.

Some twenty minutes elapsed, and another urgent summons from the interior brought us to a second halt. Number two of the trio now came out and joined his friend upon the roof. Again we went on for some distance, when number three plucking up courage, beat a tattoo that brought us to a standstill, and out *he* came. Would *he*, too, climb the roof? and, if so, would it bear the strain? Not at all. With profuse apologies, but in a very matter-of-fact way, he sat himself down on the box. Being unusually stout, if the two already

occupying the box had not been of Pharaoh's lean kine, the consequences would have been a precipitate descent into the abyss to our right.

The Germans, now in a state of bliss, were as polite as lately they had been sarcastic. But they were not yet disposed of.

Still I was glad they had come outside, and was willing to endure the discomfort of close packing. In the enjoyment of great pleasures one likes to feel that all who possibly can have their just share and proportion. The scenery was growing magnificent, even sublime, but from the interior of a coach much of it would have been lost. As it was, the two Germans perched on the roof had decidedly the best of it.

It was a glorious drive; a succession of views far grander than anything I had yet seen in the Black Forest. Travelling onwards, it reminded one of some of the best parts of the Tyrol, with all the romantic beauty and grandeur of that loveliest of countries. George Sand thoroughly appreciated the Tyrol, and looked upon it as a spot especially favoured. "*Voir le Tyrol et mourir*," is the burden of some of the pages in her "*Lettres d'un Voyageur*." And she makes one of her characters remark to a fellow traveller who was praising up some favourite spot: "Ah, madame, vous n'avez pas vu le Tyrol."

All who know the Tyrol can imagine for themselves the loving, longing tone with which the words would be uttered; the tremulous regret that would linger in the voice of the poor traveller, whose back was turned perhaps for ever upon those lovely and beloved haunts. Home for ever must be home; but when it is cast amongst all that is beautiful in creation—who then can measure the affection that home inspires?

To-day as our road ascended, the valley deepened into a precipitous ravine, covered with ferns, bramble and tangle; everything that was wild and spontaneous in nature. Far down, ran the frothy River Alb, here and there spanned by bridges of dark gray stone. Every now and then an exclamation would burst forth from enraptured lips on the top of the coach. Say what you will of the phlegmatic temperament of the Germans, at least they have an ardent appreciation of the beauties of earth. These raise them to the highest point of enthusiasm, where most Englishmen would look on with a calm approval; dignified, it may be admitted, but cold.

Looking back upon the road we had travelled, the valley fell away in folds of magnificent verdure, fold upon fold, slope beyond slope. In the far distance, mountains bounded the horizon, faint, misty, melting into mere dreams, black with pine forests. Every turn opened up fresh beauties. Here and there we passed a village, perched on the very summit of some mountain height. One of these the post-boy pointed to as his home. He had not been to it for four years, nor seen any of his people—although constantly pass-

ing almost within sight of them. They have no holidays, these diligence drivers; but they have hard, constant work, and, for pay, their food and about enough money to keep them in tobacco.

In winter the coach is often turned into a sledge, and travels day after day in a country white with snow. The roads are iron-hard with frost; the trees glisten in the sun; the cold is so intense that the driver cannot feel the reins. Often he has to trust to the horses alone. An exquisite picture no doubt, but for the poor post-boy too severe an experience to possess any charms.

To-day there was nothing of all this. It was summer; the a



ST. BLASIEN.

was soft and warm; the sun, if anything, too overpowering; there was life and breath in all nature. The road was cut out of the mountain side; with occasional short tunnels pierced through the solid rock.

The gorge twisted and turned about, displaying all kinds of angles and abrupt curves, covered with the wildest, most romantic verdure. The coach dashed along at the very edge of the precipice. We gazed into great depths; a billowy ocean of forest trees and wild heath-land. We soared above the world. And yet, all the time, far above us towered the mountains right and left. Once or twice—strange sight in this most remote, most lonely valley—we passed a great cotton factory, which sends forth its work into the gay world.

Half way on our journey we stopped for ten minutes to rest the



horses. The inn overhung the steep sides of the ravine. The hills, towering above, overshadowed it. The old stone bridge beside it spanned the chasm and led to the cotton mill hard by. A caravan had encamped at the foot of the bridge, on the green mountain slope. Its occupants might have belonged to a tribe of Spanish gipsies; perhaps did so. Dark, flashing eyes, and rich warm complexions had they; a man and a woman, as handsome as they could well be, and two children; one playing a drum, the other fondling a great dog that submitted to have his tail pulled and his throat strangled with the most resigned air in the world.

There was something strangely interesting about these gipsies: an air of refinement quite wanting in the gipsies that haunt our woods and commons and solitary highways. They might have been termed high caste gipsies. It might be, had their pedigree been traced, that the blood of many successive generations ran in their veins. Possibly they possessed hereditary rights and claims; in the far distant past, even the boast of heraldry or the pomp of power.

But the gipsies, the inn, and all its romantic surroundings had to be left, and the journey continued towards Albrück. A diligence is almost as merciless as time and tide. We went on and on through the wildest and most romantic scenery. At length the descent towards Albrück commenced; the magnificent grandeur of the Albthal was left behind. But I thought then that I had seen nothing in the Black Forest to compare with this drive, and I think so still. Whatever else is neglected by the traveller, the Albthal assuredly must be seen.

We descended rapidly to the level of the plain and to Albrück; a small manufacturing place, quietly busy, surrounded by green pastures, more or less marshy, through which the Alb flowed onward to the Rhine. That classic river, with its green, swift-flowing waters was stretched before us. Immediately beyond rose a chain of hills clothed with vineyards; villages here and there presenting a picture of quiet Swiss life. Here the Rhine divides Switzerland from Germany; a fair boundary mark; surrounded by an atmosphere of romantic legends without end.

The diligence crossed over the rails and drew up at the inn; small, unpretending, but not uncomfortable quarters, kept by two brothers, who do their best for their visitors, and do it in a pleasant way. Here I was to take train for Brennet, the station for the Wehrathal. It was five o'clock and the train would not start before eight. Thus there was time to explore the neighbourhood.

A pleasant walk, though there was little enough to be seen. A stroll through a quiet country district; a few old cottages scattered about and forming a village; the inhabitants, many of them at their suppers, sitting at round wooden tables near wide open doors. A savoury mess sent forth its odorous steam into the air. They live simply, these people; poor, yet not in poverty; having enough with

their bit of land, their garden, and their cow, added to their daily toil, to make both ends meet.

For them, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; the morrow takes care of itself; their wants are so few that what would be improvidence with some is not so with them. These remote villagers are a law unto themselves, and cannot be judged by the ordinary rules of life. With few advantages and no opportunities, they are, in a sense, dependent as children. The HAND that marks even the sparrow fall, seems to watch over them with special care. The age of miracles is past and it no longer rains manna from the skies, but these poor villagers fail not in their daily bread.

I felt a strong temptation to go in to these cottagers at their supper, and for a moment make one with them; note the old picturesque rooms black with age or smoke, or both; the rude, quaint furniture. But a sense of intrusion, often misplaced, a wonder how our entrance would be received, frequently causes us to neglect opportunities it would have been wise to make use of. So I passed by the open doors and found myself on the banks of the Rhine. The river had not been so swollen for some years, and was rushing quickly onwards. To-night its waters were a pale, beautiful, transparent green. On the opposite banks, the heights, bearing vineyards, rose abruptly. A few houses of the Swiss village almost overhung the water, casting reflections thereon. The air swarmed with insects.

It was a calm, singularly beautiful evening. The heat of the day was over; the declining sun flushed the sky; all was peace and harmony. The very insects, countless myriads though they were, whirled about without any sound.

Leaving all this at length, and making slow way towards the inn, suddenly I came upon a lady, evidently a stranger, and in search of something. Her eyes glanced right and left, and she too seemed interested in the cottages and the lives they sheltered. Then she stopped, and—being German—spoke in excellent English.

"Can you tell me," she said, "where the Alb flows into the Rhine? I so much want to see it. I looked about for it this afternoon, but could not find the spot, and somehow I did not like to ask the villagers. It must be somewhere about here."

It was the very thing I had been looking at for the last half-hour. So I went back with her down the road; then to the left past some cottages, where an old man and a boy (their supper ended) were sawing wood. Yet a little way over rough ground, where all trace of road had disappeared, and there was the little river yielding up its life to the greater. My companion looked on with evident interest.

"I quite love the little Alb," she said, after a long pause given up to gazing. "For the last six weeks I have been staying at Höchenschwand—quite in sight of the Alb—for the sake of the mountain air. I spent one season at Davos, but the air of Höchenschwand

seems to me almost as good. You are more quiet, too, and less shut in by the mountains."

"But, on the other hand, is Höchenschwand not too dull and lonely?" I inquired. "It seemed so, the night I went up to it."

"It would be\* very dull," returned the *fräulein*, "but we happened to have pleasant people staying in the house. Two old generals amused me very much, one English, the other German. Neither could speak a word of each other's language, and their efforts to compare notes and tell anecdotes were most amusing. Often I would translate for them, but I was not always at hand, and occasionally I would come in to find both red in the face with trying to keep up a conversation. They were charming old men."



INN AT SCHLUCHSEE.

"Do you know any other part of the Black Forest?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Before going to Höchenschwand I was staying at the inn at Schluchsee. I did not like it. They put me into the 'dependence' over the stables. It was very disagreeable, and the horses at night made so much noise that I could not sleep. The first day, when my maid was unpacking, a servant came in and said: 'You need not trouble to do that; no one ever stays in this room.'"

"And did you stay?"

"In that room? Only one night. I could not stand it. Altogether, I was glad to leave Schluchsee. It was so uncomfortable for my maid, too, that I sent her back to Frankfort."

"And you liked Höchenschwand?"

"Oh, very much. The place was so lovely, the air so bright, the Hotel Maier so comfortable. Everything was done to make one's

stay agreeable. Madame Maier, too, was so nice. She is the niece of the great painter Winterhalter, and I believe he left her much of his property. He wanted her to keep this hotel. He himself belonged to Menzenschwand; but he loved this place, and he wanted others to come and love it too. Yet I was very nearly never getting to Höchenschwand."

"How was that?" was the natural inquiry.

"They wanted to charge me so much for a carriage from Schluchsee that I would not pay it. I said I would take the diligence instead. I requested the conductor to put me down at a particular spot where I could get some one to take my luggage to Höchenschwand. He replied in the rudest way that he was not obliged to



SCHAFFHAUSEN.

give up my luggage before we got to St. Blasien, and he should do as he pleased. Of course, he wanted a bribe. Finally, he put me down, bag and baggage, in the middle of the high road, at the most lonely part, and left me standing there, no creature within sight or sound."

"An unpleasant position," I remarked, sympathetically. "That conductor ought to have been reported. How did you manage?"

"Fortunately, a man came up, who carried my box for me," she replied, "and I contrived to carry my bag. But was not that a most unpleasant position for what you English call an 'unprotected female?' Left in the middle of the high road with her luggage, in an unknown country, perfectly abandoned. I never felt so hopeless and miserable in my life."

"Yet is it not singular," I ventured to remark, "that in our most

hopeless situations, something invariably turns up which exactly fits into our need?"

"I have always found it so," returned my companion. "And it has often struck me that if we possessed supernatural vision and knowledge, we should find that our extremities have all been foreseen and the remedy provided: even the small perplexities of everyday life. I remember a sentence in one of your English divines with which I was much struck at the time I read it; it was this: 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.' I have never forgotten it."

Thus talking we found ourselves once more at the railway inn, where the three Germans were comfortably seated at table, taking refreshment. There was yet an hour to the departure of the train, and it was not an unwise way of passing the time. My destination that night was a small country inn, mysteriously obscure as to all information that could be gained concerning it. When I found that the three Germans were bound for the same place, I began to fear that even accommodation might fail.

After I had been seated a few minutes, they held a short conversation together in solemn undertones. Then the spokesman of the party turned to me.

"We sleep at Brennet to-night," said he.

"So do I," I replied.

"To-morrow we are going up the Wehrthal to Schönau," he continued.

So was I.

"We are going up the Belchen," he confided. It was very good of him to be so communicative, but the information was not interesting. I was not going up the Belchen. I saw that he was leading up to something, and the next remark brought it out.

"We are going to take the diligence up the Wehrthal to-morrow, and if there are only three outside seats we intend to have them."

What could be said to this very impertinent, very ungentlemanly speech? To resent it would be too humiliating, and the days of pistols and coffee are over. So merely replying that I hoped the diligence would yield room for all, I became absorbed in the baked meats on the table, and consigned the Germans to oblivion.

The train arrived, and in due course we reached Brennet, and a pitch dark platform. What had come to the night and the stars? The first person I accosted was the landlord of the little inn, looking out for possible passengers. Had he not been there, hardly should I have found my way even across the road, so inky black and bewildering was the night. As it was, I was safely within the inn, and quietly shut into a little sanctum before the train had well left the platform, and long before the three Germans (who were no more to be got rid of than the slippers in the Eastern tale) had appeared upon the scene.

In less than three minutes there suddenly burst forth a storm o



rain and hail, thunder and lightning, the fury of which could scarcely be greater. Yet half-an-hour ago the sky had been cloudless. It is these storms the vine-growers dread so much. Anyone hearing the storm that night could understand the dread, realise the destruction. I thought of the vineyards seen only that evening on the banks of the Rhine, and wondered how much of their beauty and worth would be lost in the tempest.

Alas! the next morning the rain was still falling in torrents, without visible hope of abatement. The Germans were up and dressed, had breakfasted, and departed in a hired conveyance, all in a quarter of an hour. They meant to post on to Wehr and catch the diligence, but found, on arriving at Wehr, that the diligence was a mere myth. We had all been misinformed. So, disgusted with the weather and the phantom coach, they altered their plans and posted on to Zell, there to take train; giving up the Wehrthal, Schönau, and the Belchen. After leaving Brennet, the slippers were finally disposed of: I saw the Germans no more.

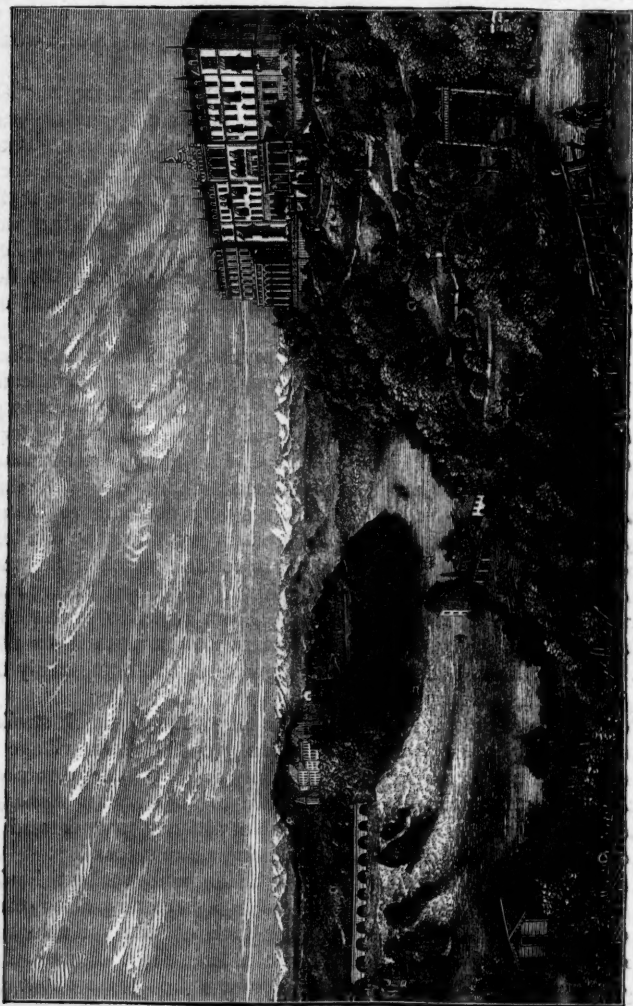
The omnibus for Wehr started about seven o'clock from the Brennet post-office, a five minutes' walk from the inn. The rain came down in torrents, and in torrents we reached Wehr. To attempt to go up the Wehrthal were folly and madness. There was nothing for it but to put up at the little Hotel Brügger, and hope for better weather.

It was all very well to hope; it never came. For three days the skies wept. It was a small country place, not very much more than a village. Between the showers I wandered up and down the one long street, gazed at the people, who gazed in return; watched the men threshing out grain with flails, the rhythm of their beat falling hour after hour monotonously on the ear. From dawn to sunset they worked away, scarcely ever resting, except now and then to note with amusement the curiosity of a stranger, and good-humouredly bid him join in the work.

To vary the occupation and pass the lingering hours, I strolled through a picturesque, but muddy, country road to the village of Hasel. Here at the inn a boy, with a key and a bundle of torches, soon made himself ready to act as guide to the famous stalactite cavern, which reaches to an impenetrable distance, and is said to possess the curiosity of white flies and blind white spiders.

A walk of half a mile through wet fields and verdant banks. The spot reached, we equipped ourselves in a becoming dress (these disguises always are becoming) kept for such occasions in a locked-up room, and were soon groping down a long flight of stairs into the singular interior. Our torches threw a weird gleam about the cavern, sufficient to make darkness visible, and enable us to see here and there a projecting point of rock, just after it had half cracked our heads with the most friendly intentions. Our own forms and faces stood out grotesquely. We might have been demons belonging to unmentionable regions.

It was interesting as a stalactite cavern, a work of the ages. The guide explained everything very intelligently, and showed some sense of grim humour in his quaint remarks. Of course there was



NEUHAUSEN.

the lake, the organ, the pulpit, the death's head and the living face, and a number of other natural devices. Some were very good; others, perhaps, might have been better if turned upside down. The cave is worth visiting if it falls in one's way and disturbs no settled

plans. Under other circumstances, it may just as well be passed over, and none need very much regret the omission. For purposes of observation or zoological study, it may be of value, for it dates back to a far distant past; but mere sentiments of curiosity will perhaps be met by a slight feeling of disappointment.

The return to Wehr, over the fields, afforded one the mild excitement of picking a way through pools and acres of mud; a short cut to the village, and hardly worse than the road had been. The day passed on to night; it would be out of the natural order of things not to do so; and the sympathetic landlady prophesied that the morrow would prove everything fair skies could make it.

We were a small weather-bound party, with no human element of discord, as good fortune would have it. At night, when the lamp was lighted in the little *salle*, the party was increased by a few neighbours, who dropped in to play cards and drink mild beer. Conspicuous amongst them was a "Herr Baron." The landlady gave him his full title at every other word, as she sat in a sociable way at the table, looked on at the game, and advanced her opinion whenever an interesting point arose; keeping an eye the while on the glasses, and rising, unbidden, to refill an empty measure with the light, frothy beverage of the country.

The "Herr Baron" was a model of strength and energy, and would now and then bring down his card upon the table with an emphasis that animated the glasses. He had a very determined expression of countenance, as befitted a "Herr Baron," and a way of speaking that seemed to defy contradiction. Yet, with it all, he was very pleasant and unassuming, although from the quiet deference paid him by the rest of the little German assembly, he was evidently much above them in rank. I wondered where he came from, whether he lived in some ancient castle on the hillside, surrounded by woods, shot bears in the winter, and hunted the chamois in summer; whether his ancestors had once owned and occupied the now ruined castle on the hill behind the inn.

So the night passed, and the next day proved, if anything, worse than the day before. The landlady was no true prophet, and was apologetic as well as sympathising. The Wehrthal was still an impossibility: The clouds were low, and enwrapped the mountains; the rain still descended like a deluge; the little band of weather-bound travellers consulted the weeping skies, looked mournfully at each other, shook their heads in harmony, and tried to be philosophical.

But all the philosophy in the world could make of Wehr nothing but a dull, tame, and uninteresting place in which to be imprisoned. Everyone agreed upon this point, when, night having once more fallen, the small coterie, including the Herr Baron, had again assembled to play cards and drink beer, and chat over the news of the day. Just then the topic in the newspapers was the sad and fluctuating

state of President Garfield. There was a division upon the point—one half fearing he would die, the other half assured of recovery. Would they had been right! His death was amongst the mysterious events in life that, unable to fathom, we accept in faith.

The next morning those eternally weeping skies were too much for human endurance, or any amount of philosophy. The little band chartered the omnibus to Brennet, and took flight. But for the advice given me at St. Blasien, I might now have gone straight on to Schaffhausen, there quietly to await better days; instead of which I was compelled to return up the Albthal in the wind and the rain, the cold and the night, get my luggage, pay my bill, and find that, for all this extra trouble, expense and discomfort, they had added insult to injury by charging half price for a room simply for taking charge of a small portmanteau.

At Brennet the whole day was before me. It was useless reaching Albbück before five o'clock, at which hour the diligence started for St. Blasien. So, to break the journey, I stopped half-way at Laufenburg on the Rhine.

It is an old, dilapidated-looking place, quaint and ancient enough to satisfy the most advanced lover of antiquity. The Rhine rushes through the old covered bridge at express speed, as if it would hurl it to destruction. Houses that look as if they dated back to the flood overhang the river, and make the place at once old-world, curious and picturesque. They appear grey, poverty-stricken, abandoned houses, but are not so in reality. The people who inhabit them have all they need, and perhaps a little to spare. Just below the bridge the Rhine is at its very narrowest. The water rushes between great rocks in an unceasing torrent with a force at once terrific and startling.

There is a very good hotel at Laufenburg—the Hotel Soolbad—and it seemed under excellent management. It overlooks the Rhine, and in summer is frequented by people who go there for the salt baths. Its situation is excessively picturesque, and pleasant walks abound. The Rhine was so swollen that the gardens were swamped, boats were turned upside down, and altogether the place looked very much out of its normal condition. The waters were in the cellars; and to-morrow, said the manager, almost with tears in his eyes, his dining-room would be flooded, unless they began to subside.

The table d'hôte consisted of a cluster of ancient but no doubt amiable ladies, the remnant of the season, who having taken a course of the baths, had, let us hope, benefited thereby. They spoke in high terms of the manager, and regretted that the hotel was not properly known and patronised.

Albbück. It was still raining hard when the diligence started for St. Blasien at a quarter past five. But the interior was unendurable, and, defying wind and weather, I took place beside the courier. The grandeur of the drive was conspicuous, in spite of lowering

clouds, rain, and thorough discomfort. At the wayside inns the driver was equal to any number of "kirschwassers," and one almost envied him his capacity; at least, it helped to keep up his animation.

About nine o'clock we reached St. Blasien, cold, wet and miserable. Was it any wonder that for two pins one could have consigned the givers of bad advice to annihilation? I saw little of St. Blasien on this occasion. Arriving in darkness, before eight o'clock the next morning I had breakfasted, paid the bill, and was, bag and baggage, for the second time on the road to Albbück.

At Albbück I took train for Neuhausen. Before that station was reached the capricious weather had changed. All was once more blue skies and sunshine, and at the Schweizerhof one found rest, quiet, and civilisation for the Sunday.

Schaffhausen is a short, pleasant walk from Neuhausen, or the hotel omnibus will take you to it. It is an antiquated town, with much that is curious and picturesque. Everyone stops at Neuhausen, but none should neglect at least one visit to the old town. The houses overlooking the river are a picture in themselves; and there are ancient buildings, monuments, and fountains that have seen the rise and fall of many generations.

It was no longer the Black Forest, but a new country, new scenes. Below the Schweizerhof at Neuhausen flowed the green waters of the Rhine; before it were the grand falls of Schaffhausen, a wide mass of seething foam and rushing, tumbling water. Across the Rhine stretched the chain of the snowy Alps, and the canopy of blue sky beyond was a fitting background to this earthly paradise. Later on, when night had fallen, the moon threw a silvery gleam upon the river, lighting up the falls to the point of enchantment. Nothing could be more lovely, more romantic than the scene. Save for the rushing water, the whole surrounding neighbourhood was steeped in silence.

Sunday rose clear and brilliant, one of the hottest days of that summer. From the windows of the hotel one gazed upon a fair Sabbath scene of beauty and romance. The slopes leading from the hotel to the river were half cultivated, half wild. The hotel itself was excellent, one of its chief points being the pretty girls that waited in the dining-room in the picturesque costumes of the country. They went through their duties with a quietness, a certain grace not easily accounted for. Later on, the landlord explained the mystery.

It was an experiment he had now tried for two seasons, with a success one could very well imagine. These young women were not ordinary servants, and were not so treated by him. None of them were obliged to go out to service; some were the daughters of physicians and men in that rank of life; the father of one of them was a chief member of the Senate.

They came for two or three months in the year; came to see a little of life, and to be initiated into the mysteries of house-keeping.



Thus when they married they would not be quite ignorant of these important matters. They had their own sitting-room, and their sole duty was to wait in the *salle à manger*. With their rich velvet bodices, gay petticoats and silver ornaments, they looked wonderfully picturesque. For their services they received, at the end of the season, a sum which served them as pocket-money. Not a few, said the landlord, were reluctant to leave the gay scene for their quiet country homes, when the time came. No doubt to many the comparison was in favour of the hotel.

The landlord, on his side, could have found no better plan for adorning his dining-room. It was the picture that remained longest in the mind after leaving Neuhausen. The large cool room decorated with tropical plants; its great open windows looking on to the green, sparkling waters of the Rhine, the rushing, wonderful falls of Schaff-



THE ALBTHAL.

hausen, the picturesque Schloss Laufen above them; and, prettiest sight of all, because most human, the maidens that moved about so quietly in their costumes, waiting upon you with so gentle a manner, that they took all hearts captive.

I left it all on the Monday morning to return to the Black Forest. But that return was the beginning of the end. A few more days and the scene would change to a land of small romance and great realities, but which, no doubt, possesses special virtues of her own.

And, gentle reader, you, whose patience, I fear, has been sorely taxed in rambling with me about the Black Forest, shall be taxed but little longer. The driest sermon, the dullest page, the longest lane, all have an end. Yet my last days in the Black Forest were not the least enjoyed; the scenes I passed through not the least worthy of note. It is well that last impressions should be peculiarly pleasant. They gild all that has gone before, whether of good or ill. The fine sunset of an especially lovely day in our life, lingers long in the memory; often is destined to fade only with life itself.

## ON BOARD THE "EAGLE."

THE clock had struck eleven. We were still sitting on the hearthrug in our chamber, Mary and I, over the remains of the wood fire that had sparkled and cracked in the huge old fireplace, filling the room with its light and warmth, but was now reduced to a few bright coals, which cast occasional glimmerings of fitful light over the low ceiling of the spacious room. We had been talking, instead of undressing ; and, under the influence of the bright fire, the talk had been gay and frolicsome, so, under the shade of the dying fire, our conversation became more subdued and sober.

There was a slight tap at the door, which startled us, and Aunt Eliza's bright old face peeped in.

"Why, girls, not in bed yet?"

"Oh, Aunt Eliza, Frances was beginning to tell me a ghost story ; one she read to-day in a periodical," exclaimed Mary.

"But it was a very stupid story," I put in, "and it turned out in the end to be no ghost at all. Could not you tell us one, Aunt Eliza? A real one? It is just the hour for it."

Mrs. H. came forward and sat down in the low dimity-covered chair. She had a sad, grave look upon her face.

"I don't know that I can tell you a ghost story, Frances : some people ridicule the very thought of ghosts ; but I can tell you something that happened to myself. It is perfectly true, and you can call it what you please."

Never a more honest-hearted, truthful woman lived than Aunt Eliza H. ; and so we knew that what she was about to say *was* true.

"Well," she began, quietly at first, but with an earnest tremulousness in her voice as she progressed, that showed time had not obliterated traces of the excitement she must have experienced at the period, "perhaps you have heard that in the years gone by, when we were out in the West, your mother's uncle, my husband, had a little controversy about some land, lying on a part of the Mississippi river, which, after much delay, it was agreed by the parties, should be settled by arbitration."

"All that long while ago, Aunt Eliza !" interrupted Mary.

"Yes, my dear, all that long while ago ; long before either of you were born. In consequence of this decision, your Uncle James had to journey to G., the spot where the land lay, and where he would probably have to remain for a week or two, for the case was both complicated and difficult. I had a good head for accounts and for classification, and had been of much use to my husband in that way ever since our marriage ; he, though an active and clever manager of his estate, hated its accounts, and was naturally careless into the

bargain, and he used laughingly to say we ought to have changed places. He insisted upon my accompanying him to G., declaring he should get into a fog with the law papers unless I went, and never get out of it again. I was willing enough to go, only I did not much like leaving my children, who were very young then, and my large household of servants."

"And did you go, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, I went. When a husband's interests pull you one way, and other interests pull the other, I think it is a woman's duty to choose those of her husband. Well, to make my story short, I went with him, leaving the house and the children and the servants to take care of themselves and each other. The day before we left, I went to the town, three or four miles distant, to see Mrs. D., an intimate friend, to tell her where I was going, and to ask her to drive over to the plantation once in a while, to look how things might be going on; which she readily promised to do. She and I were the dearest and closest friends possible to be in this world, Frances; I have never had another like her."

Aunt Eliza put her hand before her eyes, and held it there for a moment. Then resumed with a sigh.

"We went to G. by land, driving; a disagreeable journey of two days: but my husband wanted to see a settler who lived on the road. We found G. the dirtiest, most uncomfortable place imaginable, and had to take up our abode at a miserable tavern, for we could get no better accommodation. However, travellers in those days in America could not be fastidious, and we made the best of it. I set to work, making a memoranda for the umpire, copying testimony, and helping all I could to 'get order out of the chaos' of an old, unsettled, badly-managed partnership. On the second Saturday night, I lay down on the hard tavern bed, pretty well worn out with the kind of work which is distasteful to most women, but was not so to me."

"And how was the case decided?"

"Oh, my dears, wait. Early on Sunday morning—it was about ten days after we got there—I awoke before it was light, with a strange impression that I was wanted at home—that something was wrong there. You are looking at me, Frances; with surprise, I suppose. All I can tell you is, that what I say is strictly true. It was a most anxious, restless *conviction* that had seized hold of me. I could not account for it; I could not drive it away. Something or other was amiss at home, and I was wanted there."

"'You must let me go, James,' I said to my husband, awaking him in the glimmering dawn of the winter morning."

"But he only laughed at me. The more I urged it, the more he laughed, saying it was only a dream, which must have left a disagreeable impression on me. I hardly knew what to do. Had I insisted upon going he would not have held out against it; but one

hardly likes to take an unusual and inconvenient step in obedience to a mere fancy. I could have gone, you understand; I mean that there were means that day to allow of it; for a passenger steam-boat would touch at G. in about an hour's time, which would take me home by night, and I could get ready for it if I made haste. I did not make ready. While shilly-shallying, as we say, miserably undecided what I ought to do, the minutes passed on, the boat came and passed, and it was too late. But now, whether my not going had increased the impression of something being wrong, I cannot tell; all I know is, that I grew insupportably troubled, and, after a most uncomfortable day, I wound it up with a long fit of tears. James grew uncomfortable at that, and said I should go the next morning."

"And did you go, Aunt Eliza?"

"Oh, yes. About ten o'clock a large boat, called the *Eagle*, stopped at G. on her downward weekly trip. The clerk, or purser, came ashore to receive some freight. He was a very little man, slightly deformed in the back, but with one of the nicest countenances I ever saw, and a gentle voice and manner. My husband, who knew him, put me under his charge, and we were soon off. We had a good many passengers, but I was too uneasy to make acquaintance with any of them, beyond a few necessary words of civility. I sat in solitary silence all day; and as the night hours drew on and on, I grew more anxious, more nervous. We called at different places, and nearly all the passengers by degrees left the boat; but two or three gentlemen remained, who were on deck, smoking. I was by myself in the long, dreary saloon, its sole occupant. A cabin-boy passed along, silently extinguishing all the lights except one burner in each chandelier. I knew I should reach home about midnight, and of course I might have lain down until then; but sleep was gone far away from me. On one of the tables was a Bible; I opened it, and tried to read a chapter—tried to get a little of God's blessed comfort into my uneasy heart: but, do as I would, I could not concentrate my thoughts.

"I closed the book, and looked up and down. There was not a soul visible in the long cabin of that boat; which seemed to me then, and seems to me still, the longest boat I ever was on. At the further end was a piano between the two doors that opened upon the guards, or otherwise—I never knew where. An 'Annual,' as certain choice books were called in those days, lay on the sofa. I tried to look at the engravings, and mechanically turned the leaves, but I literally saw nothing.

"At last, as a next resort—I couldn't sit still, I couldn't read, I couldn't sleep—I got up and walked to the end of the cabin. I turned to walk back again, when, behold! standing before the doorway I have mentioned, the one on the left of the piano, was Mrs. D. I stood still, thinking the light must deceive me. But no, it was truly Mrs. D., the same light dress upon her that she wore the day we

parted—a dress I knew well and had seen her wear many times: a white Indian foulard, trimmed with light green satin—the same sweet smile upon her face. But the smile then had been gay; now it was mournfully sad with a shade of reproach in it. Her hand was extended, as though in greeting: and the thought came rushing into my mind that she had come to meet me to break to me some dire calamity that had happened in my home: totally losing sight, in my confusion, of the question—how had she got on board? She had on no bonnet, no out-of-door things of any kind; her fair and abundant hair was disposed as usual. I was perhaps twenty feet off, but my eyes were rivetted upon her. I quickened my step, my eye brightened, my lips were forming words of affection. I put forth my hand, and, as I thought, touched her. A thrill went through me like what would be imparted by sudden contact with cold, burnished brass. My hand had touched the bolt of the door—the door being, as before, closely shut; ay, and locked. Mrs. D. was not there. *No one* was there. The cabin was empty!

"I heard my own heart beat like a drum, as I sank, appalled, upon the sofa. A voice roused me: I suppose I was looking white.

"'Is anything the matter with you, madam?'

It was the voice of the civil clerk. It seems he had come into the saloon behind me as I turned. I gasped out 'No.'

"'But there is, I think,' he continued in his compassionate voice. 'You seem painfully nervous?'

"'Did you see any lady in the cabin when you came in?' I asked, trying to steady my trembling lips.

"'Any lady!' he echoed in surprise. 'No, madam, certainly not.'

"'There,' I said, pointing to the left-hand door. 'She was standing there. Or I fancied so.'

"'Ay, madam, it must have been fancy. We have not any lady on board but yourself: they have all landed. Not a female of any sort.'

"'I wish I was at home! Can you tell me what time it is?'

"He pulled out his watch and looked at it. 'It is just past ten,' he said: 'three or four minutes past it.'

"I could see that he believed I felt lonely and nervous. So he sat down on the opposite seat, talking, and trying to interest me. I answered 'yes' and 'no' mechanically, but I had not the remotest idea of what the poor man was saying. A question kept ringing in my ears, surging in my brain—what was the meaning of that figure I had seen?—and I felt nearly persuaded that Mrs. D. *was* on board; but that for some reason she had concealed herself from me. Could it be that she had worse tidings for me than she dared to tell? Had all my little ones been taken from me by some overwhelming calamity? Had an earthquake laid the house in ruins? Had —

"'We shall be late to-night,' said the clerk, interrupting my gloomy presages. 'We had so many places to stop at to-day and hindered



more time than we ought at most of them] It does happen sometimes.'

"Late?' I repeated.

"By pretty near an hour, madam. We ought to touch at your place, Mrs. H., before midnight; instead of that, it will be close upon one o'clock.'

"Three hours to wait yet! Three long mortal hours before my fears could be confirmed—or laid at rest!—My dears," added Aunt Eliza, dropping her voice, "for years after, when I recalled what those hours of suspense were to me, I turned sick.

"Are you sure that no other lady is on board?' I again asked of the clerk.

"Quite sure, madam,' he answered. 'Every one has been landed.

"Do you chance to know Mrs. D.—wife of Senator D.?'

"Oh yes,' he said. 'She and the Senator went up with us last fall, and came back with us the following week.'

"It was Mrs. D. I thought I saw: who was standing there. She held out her hand to me!'

"The clerk shook his head. 'All fancy, madam; nothing else. Perhaps you had been dozing and were thinking of her.'

"I shut my eyes. He supposed I might be inclined to doze again, and stole noiselessly out of the cabin. Two or three times he looked in as the time went on, but did not disturb me again.

"At length the boat's shrill whistle announced my proximity to home. The whistle and the bell made a fearful din. I put on my bonnet and went on deck. It was just one o'clock, that witching hour, when the boat stopped in front of our house. John, our attached negro servant, was running down the path with a lantern. He always had to meet this Monday's boat, for it generally brought parcels of some kind or other for us.

"Precious late dis night,' he called out. 'What is dere come?'

"I had come: and John looked beyond measure astonished to see me. 'All well at home, John?' I asked as I landed: and I knew not how I got the words out.

"All well, missis,' he said, in his cheery voice.

"All well, did you say,' I repeated, as we walked on to the house. 'The—the children, John?'

"All quite well, missis.'

"Now, what had my fears meant?—whither had they flown? 'And Mrs. D., John?' I went on. 'Do you know whether she is at home?'

"The man's tones dropped to a sad whisper—as if some fear assailed him. 'O, Missis D., she is very bad, missis; doctors think she die. Cassie, she been over dere all day.'—And at that moment, as if speaking of Cassie, who was my nurse, had brought her to the spot, she appeared at the hall door. 'Ah, Cassie just got back,' said John: 'me thought dem were wheels I heard.'

"'Cassie,' I said, 'how is Mrs. D.?'"

"'Oh, poor Mrs. D. ! she just dead, missis. She die just as clock strike ten.'

"I could not answer. I was shivering all over.

"'She took ill yesterday, Sunday, at day-break,' continued Cassie, the tears running down her pale cheeks, for she was only half-caste. 'She cry out for you all day, missis, all day, all day. I go over dis morning, when they tell me dat, and I stay till the end.'

"'Did she cry out for me to-day, also?'"

"'No, only yesterday, missis. All night, all day; dis day, she worse; she make no cry for nobody. She wake up, like, on the stroke o' ten, and she raised her head and look all round the room, and look at us, at one of us after de other, as if she look for some one not dere; and den in a moment she was gone.'"

"Oh, Aunt Eliza! Can this be true?"

"I have told you it is true," she said, getting up to kiss us both: "and it is quite time you went to bed."

"But—stay one instant longer, aunt," pleaded Mary. "Did you ever have another experience like that? Ever feel that you were unaccountably wanted somewhere?"

"Never since. One such experience is enough in a life-time."

"Or—see another ghost, aunt?" I put in.

"Never another, Frances; never another. I do not take upon myself to maintain, I told you, that it was a ghost I saw then. The world is sceptical on these points, you know. Good night, my dears."

But, talking together in solemn whispers as we undressed, Mary and I, we asked each other what else it could have been.



## BITTER SWEET.

## I.

A SYMPHONY of sound and light and scent. A voice of many birds twittering delicately to each other from newly-built nests, amid boughs that swayed to and fro in the wind, and shook their latest buds into leaf and blossom. Into the woodland from far below came a murmur of waves trailing on a shingly beach, and mingling with this murmur, the talk and laughter of the fishermen mellowed by distance. Right down through the sloping woodland a brooklet leapt tinkling and gurgling to the sea.

The dim fragrance and dappled lights and pleasant sounds of the day made a threefold joy to a young girl who stood beneath the trees in the April noon. She stood on a part of the slope whence the trees had drawn back a little, and the light fell about her just beyond the verge of the shadow. Round her feet were dead leaves and living flowers, and soft green mosses full of the sweet rain that had fallen all the previous night. With one hand she shaded her eyes, the other was uplifted to tend back a branch which had barred the open space. Her hair was blown in a brown cloud about her face, and her hazel eyes shone with a serious joy beneath the shading hand.

For the first time in her life she was tasting that singular gladness which comes to mind and body, when alone with nature in spring, after a long illness. To this full content of hers, all the long hours of fevered tossing to and fro, followed by tedious weeks of convalescence, were but a background.

And now into her loneliness there came another human presence—a young man, carelessly whistling, treading gaily over moss and flower till he reached the rivulet and paused on the farther side, looking at the tall, slim figure in the soft grey gown, crowned by the brown hair and wistful face. Just one moment, and he turned off a little higher up and sprang across the stream. Only one look, and there might have been no second; their lives might have glided apart for ever, but for an accident—or what we call accident; which is really a strong link in many a chain of life. As his foot touched the bank he slipped on the damp earth, spraining his ankle in the fall. He drew himself into a sitting posture and leant against a tree, faint with pain. The young girl came quickly towards him. "I will run and get help," she said, and meeting his grateful look for a moment, went quickly along the path that led towards Cloverleigh, the village where she and her father were staying. At a turning, she met a tall scholarly-looking man.

"I was looking for you, Margaret. Are you wise to go bareheaded, my child?" he said anxiously.

"My hat fell into the brook, and it is so mild. But, oh! papa, there is a gentleman hurt down there. He has sprained his ankle and cannot walk." And she waved her hand towards the woods below. They found him faint and white; but he made light of his suffering as they helped him through the fringe of apple and pear trees to his lodging in Cloverleigh.

## II.

Most of our lives are Bitter-Sweet; but if there is one period in it when the bitter and the sweet are superlative, it is when Love takes possession of soul and body as instruments whereon to play his mighty preludes.

Margaret Townsend had lived alone almost all her life, with her father, a quiet student, loving but his daughter and his books, and so her life was full of associations but not of friends. None of the bloom had been worn off her soul by that playing at love called flirtation. She had read, with a certain solemnity, some old books wherein mention was made of men who had died and done other things for love; and she may have had dreams on the subject, but filmy and shifting as dreams generally are.

Her father had taught her Greek, and so "she chanced upon the poets," and their thoughts had given flavour to her own. Some time before this had come illness; it had seemed at one moment as if she must cross the narrow bound of Time into the wide spaces of Eternity: but slowly death had let go his hold, and she was well enough now to enjoy the change to the quaint Devonshire fishing village, perched in the rift of a headland among ancestral trees and bowers of ash and apple and pear.

It is unique, this village, with its hundred steps leading down to the quay and the shingly shore. The houses rise one above the other, and the quaint rooms in them are let in summer to visitors with good walking powers. Its only inn is a temple of bric-a-brac, and, in summer, is crowded with pilgrims visiting at one of the shrines of nature. In this sequestered solitude, the father and daughter and Dr. John Enderby were at present the only strangers, and the young doctor, after two or three days, limped into Margaret's sunlit sitting-room, into which the light filtered through a network of budding apple boughs. Here he would sit and watch Margaret at work, or listen to her as she read some old-world book to her father, her fresh young voice contrasting with the oft-times crabbed style; and, as he thus watched her, she grew inexpressibly pleasant to him. Pleasant, and that was all.

But to Margaret? Without one word of warning, had come the crowning affection of her life. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," then fades away. But once more it lies about man and woman

in the mellow time of youth with a beauty that baby eyes never yet beheld; and earth borrows of this heavenly light. Did ever such sunlight pass through the rosy film of the apple blossoms that nestled against the wall and made a bower before Margaret's window? And as for the blue bay gleaming below,—was it really so cruel after all? Did so many husbands and fathers and sons lie tossing in its depths? It looked so caressing, washing the feet of the red cliffs where the greenery crept down to meet it.

John was free to come and go as he liked in the blossom-screened room, holding learned converse with Mr. Townsend, meeting his daughter in the woods, now fully leafed, sometimes helping her over the rocks in search of anemones. On fine evenings the three would sit on the little semi-circular pier that enclosed the "quay pule," and watch the sunset fading and the darkness nestling down among the wooded headlands, and the great evening star suddenly appearing in the blue above the paling primrose that touched the water. After that the sky would swiftly fill with stars, and the moon would spring into the airy silence, and her light would penetrate sky and sea and cliff-hung village, the lights would appear one by one in the windows above, and they would climb homeward.

All this fed the warm friendliness he felt for her, which is often mistaken for love. The fragrance of her life filled his imagination, and he determined to make her his wife. But of that delicious agony, that glorious fear that makes pallid the face of the lover, the void in the life that must be filled by the presence of a beloved woman—what did he know? Nothing.

His nature was as yet cold, hers was all aglow. She was one of those women, passionate, yet sweet and pure, with sensitive bodies that quiver with pain at any strong emotion. If she had never seen him again, it is improbable that she would ever have cared for another; perhaps she would have waited in eternity for the sequence of that first glance of his.

They lingered on till the honeysuckle wooed the meadow-sweet in the deep lanes above the village, and the young summer was in its beauty. Then there came a moment when the two being alone in the woodland path overhanging the sea, John asked Margaret to be his wife. It was the sweetest time of the afternoon, just before sunset, when the day has lost its weariness and the sky is calm, and the sunshine is dimmed by a soft haze.

Mr. Townsend had left them in order to write a letter which he had forgotten, and the others had sauntered towards the village in dreamy silence. Then she became aware that he was asking her to be his wife, telling her that she was the sweetest woman he had ever seen. Whence then her sudden shrinking from him, as in fear?

"I am not good enough," she cried. She was afraid of her joy, for she was a timid woman, but in the midst of his wooing he was vexed at her humility, not understanding it, for he was only offering



her a scanty armful of first-fruits, and she was returning him the full harvest of her soul, though she did not know its value. He drew her to him and kissed the brown head and laid it on his breast. She began to cry—she had been so greedy of joy lately, and here was its perfection !

And he?—well, it was the sweetest hour he had ever passed in his life. This girl, with her simple dress and manner, and her serious brown eyes and undertone of joyfulness about her, satisfied the more spiritual side of his nature. And yet she was not the ideal of his past, which ideal had been compounded of soft-voiced Cordelia, passionate Juliet, bright Rosalind, witty Beatrice and dear Desdemona—in fact, of all the sweets of many natures compacted into one.

She was not his heroine, but he was her hero, and her gladness inclined towards sadness ; for a true woman sees herself valueless at the moment she believes that the “man of men” sees in her a precious jewel.

“Are you sorry?” he asked, half jestingly.

“Sorry !” she said, and, with a frank yet coy gesture, she nestled close to his heart.

### III.

Windborough is a country town, seated in the midst of a smiling plain which stretches to a line of low wooded hills on the north, and loses itself in the far horizon in every other direction. It is a sleepy town, full of old houses and old traditions, and prides itself rather on its ruins than on its famous woollen manufacture. It is built in the form of a cross—indeed, its main street is called Crossgate. In one of the arms of the cross—the one towards Woodleigh, with its famous old castle—are the best houses, in which the smaller gentry and the professional men live.

At the end of the Woodleigh Road was Dr. Enderby's house, large and old-fashioned ; and hither he brought his wife Margaret not long after their first meeting in the Cloverleigh woods. It was a change from the intense quiet of her girlhood to a large circle of friends, and a few secret enemies. But she was John's wife, and her sweet gaiety filled his house with sunshine ; and she shaped herself a home in all gladness. The old red-brick house had pleasant rooms, filled with comfortable furniture, softly cushioned chairs, and low tables, and plenty of flowers ; there were no dingy-looking dados, no sad-looking discoloured blossoms worked on kitchen towels. As Margaret was not æsthetic, she preferred cheerful chintz and soft velvet.

Her own sanctum was a small room overlooking the garden, and furnished with soft shades of green. There were oak shelves filled with her favourite books, a writing-table, and a few low chairs. At the window were white lace curtains, and on the mantelpiece a jar of Venetian glass that looked like a fragment of sunset. Near the window was a stand of flowers that varied according to the seasons.

In spring there were primroses and violets—even a few tulips; in summer, roses and mignonette; in autumn and winter, ferns and mosses, with perhaps a red geranium to light them up. Outside in the garden was a great elm overhanging the lawn, and the flower-beds were as old-fashioned as the house.

In this room of Margaret's, John Enderby loved to rest in his intervals of leisure, watching his wife with an interest and a strange timidity that grew deeper day by day. Poor Margaret felt him farther from her, and a shadow fell across her life that the birth of her little son could not wholly chase away. When the child was about nine months old, it happened that she was often alone, for it was an unhealthy autumn, and Dr. Enderby's services were in great requisition, not only among the rich, but also among the poor—for he was gentle as well as skilful. Now and then he would come in and resume his old habit of silently watching and listening to her talk about little Jack. How she loved that child! What sweet music his tiny fingers discoursed on that mother's heart-strings!

One afternoon her husband came in as she was sitting with the child on her knee—a bright, fair-haired, brown-eyed boy, very like his father. The baby stretched out his dimpled arms to his father, then with a child's mischief withdrew them, and hid his face on his mother's bosom with a cooing laugh. She bent her head down on the fluffy curls, and caught his little bare feet in her hand (he had pulled off his shoes and socks, the tiny rogue!), and she kissed the rosy toes with lovely mother-worship.

"Look, John," she said; "isn't he the most wonderfully sweet child, this precious baby? What should we do without him?"

She was flushed and laughing, arms and heart full too; but a sharp pang flashed through him.

He answered quietly, "Yes, he is a fine boy for his age," and, bending down, kissed him; but he went away after that without further speech. It often happened so now, and Margaret could not divine the cause; so she was hurt, and turned more and more to the baby for comfort.

On this occasion the doctor went to his study, locked the door, and sat down to wrestle with himself, also to take stock of his forces for that wrestling.

Terrible and sweet revelation to the man! He had, as the phrase goes, fallen in love—fortunately with his wife. This, then, was the meaning of his silence, his jealousy, of the tearing away of his old pleasant friendliness towards her. This love of his was no flame that would flash and die out, but the strong white heat, the very soul of the heavenly fire.

He remembered now how she had said, "I am not worthy." Now he understood,—she had loved him at that time—how far away it seemed—with the whole force of her being; and he,—well, with self-depreciation and some well-deserved self-blame, he saw his blind-

ness and the terrible risk he had run. He wanted only his wife, his Margaret; but what if he, Margaret's husband, had never felt this delight in her? Might he not have met some other woman for the sake of whom he would possibly have been tempted to repent his marriage?

He was a good man, upright and true; but he had often played at love before his marriage, "ere life-time and love-time were one," and he was being punished now; for he doubted whether her love had not declined into that friendliness which he had given her before, and she was absorbed in the child.

Was she, then, one of those women in whom the instinct of motherhood is stronger than all other? He worshipped her now with the full sacred passion of his manhood, and was his own child to come between, and shut him away from her? She would be always sweetly dutiful, he knew that,—but duty, wifely duty! A man is nothing if he does not want more than that; and what was his life to be if she and the child dwelt apart in a little Paradise of their own? He was jealous of his own child. At this point the man threw himself on his knees and finished his conflict there, and it was well for him that he did so.

#### IV.

The very names of Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, carry us back in thought to the world's dawn; but their modern antitypes are to be found everywhere: in the fullest perfection amongst women, sad to say, and more perceptible in a country town than in a city.

And when poor Job—feminine Job especially—is sitting in the ashes of desolation, then do they, softly seated on the cushion of self-righteousness, proceed to comment disparagingly on the sufferer's past behaviour.

Now, Eliphaz and Co. were not wanting in Windborough society, and in the case of John and Margaret soon perceived "the rift in the lute;" and being low, mean souls, they set to work to find a low, mean cause for it, having no idea of the higher love between man and woman.

They were three middle-aged spinsters, who had failed to enter the holy estate of matrimony, in spite of an earnest desire to do so. When the roses of youth and riches were no longer for them, they would fain have culled the chrysanthemums of life's autumn; but, alas! even those sad and scentless flowers were denied them. So these three had been soured, or rather were unloved through a certain sourness of nature which the masculine portion of mankind had had sagacity enough to perceive and to avoid. Miss Moss, Miss Brown, and Miss Jones were friends, and much of the mischief in Windborough might be traced to them. For instance, had they not discovered Mr. Blight the curate's shameful flirtation with little Miss

Wilson? and here was Dr. Enderby taking to his old flirting ways again! If he had married a sensible, intellectual person, she might have cured him by carefully looking after him; but now his attending the meetings of the Book Club without his wife, and walking home with little Miss Fry and her Quaker mother, boded no good. So said they, shaking their heads. This was after morning service on Sunday, and they resolved that on Monday morning, while the doctor was away on his rounds, they would call and enlighten his wife. "It will do her good, poor thing," they remarked.

So the three came on Monday morning, and, after a few common-places, Miss Moss, who was a faded beauty, and therefore the bitterest, began.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Enderby, we can see that you are suffering, poor dear, and no wonder!"

Margaret looked at them, bewildered. "I am quite well," she said.

"But about the doctor, my dear; we have known him so long, and understand his ways. If you had been a little more experienced you would have looked better after your husband."

"But he is not ill," answered the wife, still more bewildered.

"Not in body," remarked Miss Brown, with a significant smile; "but in mind, we mean; he pays great attention to the Frys next door, you know."

"And Miss Fry is very pretty," added Miss Jones.

If she had not been so angry, Margaret would have laughed; John had walked home with their neighbours twice, and she was very fond of them. John might not love her; that she had found out, she thought; but she knew him to be the very soul of honour. She was generally so quiet that when her anger blazed out they were startled.

"Will you be so good as to leave my husband's affairs alone?" she said. "If you wish to be wicked, there is no need to show such bad taste as to come here and endeavour to do harm."

And then they, feeling that for once they had been vanquished, quickly took their departure. But their words had left a sting behind them.

Was it so visible, then, even to these gossips—the fact that she had found out some time ago, namely, that she was not to him all that he was to her? When she had discovered it she had determined to take thankfully what he could give; but, alas! beloved, who will be grateful for a few crumbs seeing a full meal beyond? The hunger of the soul cannot be stifled; it cries out for food. Well, she tried not to blame him; he had mistaken his feeling for her, and was tired of her; but there was her baby.

She never told her husband of that visit, though she believed he regretted his marriage; she only clung to the child—such a frail little reed to lean upon. And one day it broke.

It was a Sunday—one of those sweet days in the late autumn which nature saves out of the summer. The trees had lost their

leaves, and the sunshine showed all their delicate irregularity—their beauty of mere form, which had been hidden by the foliage. The golden asters and red geraniums still brightened the sheltered garden. A ball was lying on the frosty grass, but the tiny fingers that had played with it would never touch it more, for Baby Jack was going fast to a Land in which, let us not say there are no toys for the angel children. You remember Martin Luther's letter to his boy Hans, in which he tells him of a lovely Paradise, with golden toys, whips, and drums, and childish delights.

This little child was dying of croup. His mother could only hold the little form on her knee, while John knelt beside her trying useless remedies to comfort her. At last he stood still, looking down sorrowfully at the signs of ebbing life.

Suddenly he knelt and touched the little clenched hand with his lips, and heavy tears plashed down upon it—his dear little boy; it was hard!

Margaret bent forward. "You do love him, John!" She was jealous for him that he should have his full share of love before he went. John understood, and his look answered her. What instinct had made her ask?

The fluttering breath grew shorter and shorter; it was near the end now, and little Jack opened his eyes and said, for the first and last time, quite clearly, "Mamma." That was all she was to have—the one word, and the angels would have the rest. Terrible, awfully mysterious death had borne away the spirit of the babe, and left only the little body cold and white as a snow-wreath; but a smile hovered on the tiny face.

At that moment the bells rang out for morning service, filing the clear air with their solemn merriment.

"And the bells of the City rang again," said John, softly. Margaret could weep then, and the nurse took the dead child from her arms, and went softly out, shutting the door.

#### V.

So John comforted his wife, but her grief grew silent. She was gentle to him, but her thoughts were with the dead child. She told herself that it was better that he should be with the angels, and he would sing hymns, and perhaps play in the golden streets; but she had a hurt feeling, for he would never be her own baby again. Mothers' hearts are hungry things, and she felt that she had nothing left. Her husband divined this mixed feeling, but in the shyness of his new love could not penetrate her silence.

After a while her strength failed; and, in great anxiety, he brought her back to Cloverleigh, to the old rooms that had been bowered by the apple blossoms; but blossoms and birds were all gone now. Here Margaret grew restless; her thoughts turned from little Jack for



the first time, and the afternoon after they came, she wandered out by herself to the woods above the house. The sun was shining, and there were one or two late daisies in the grass. She stooped and gathered them. Her baby had been fond of them, and she had made him so many chains of them in the past summer, and he had broken them, with his little coo just like a bird.

She went on, dry-eyed and desolate.

She started. Here was the place where John had asked her to be his wife, and with a pang she remembered the intensity of her joy. Ah! how the petals had fallen from the flower. It had been unjust of John to take her without loving her. He had sought her and wooed her, and now she was so lonely.

She heard his step, and turned to hide from him; but the trees were bare now. Half curiously she looked at him. He had not seen her yet, for his eyes were bent on the ground. Unconscious of her presence, he took no pains to hide his despondency, and she could see how grief-worn was the handsome, kindly face. Contemplating him thus she forgot herself, and the old strong love shone in her eyes. He looked up, and saw her pale and slim in her black dress; but there was that in those eyes which drew him to her to murmur in her ear how much he loved her, and she turned to him as she had never done before. "I am not worthy, dear," he said, having also learnt the divine humility.

So the bitter changed entirely to sweet; not suddenly, for it took some time for Margaret to lose her jealousy of the angels. And that time was chronicled in her soul as, "the winter our baby died, and I first knew how dear I was to John."



## THE FULL MAY MOON.

It was in the pleasant spring-time,  
 When trees are budding green,  
 And violets scent the meadows—  
 It was on a Sunday e'en;  
 The service of praise was over  
 (The parson had kept them late),  
 When a maiden bade her lover  
 "Good night," at her garden gate.

"The moon's at the full this evening,"  
 She said, "at the full, at ten,  
 And those who are watching and wishing  
 May have what they wish for then.  
 And I will watch from my window,  
 And wish—what I will not tell."  
 Said he, "And at ten this evening,  
 I will watch and wish as well."

And at ten they both were watching;—  
 Each knew that the other's eyes  
 Were fixed on the fateful planet  
 That shone in the southern skies.  
 Each knew what the other wished for,  
 Though neither had said a word;  
 Each knew the other was praying,  
 Though neither the other heard.

But a cloud came sailing slowly  
 Across the sky, apart,  
 Till it hid the moon, and its shadow  
 Fell on each beating heart.  
 And they knew it was an omen  
 To the love, so true and fond,  
 A shadow of evil coming  
 In the life that lay beyond.

And time has passed and is passing,  
 And both are growing old,  
 Yet neither heart has forgotten,  
 And neither heart is cold.  
 But still they are waiting and wishing  
 For a day that comes not soon,  
 When, hand in hand, together  
 They may gaze on the full May Moon.

J. T. BURTON WOLLASTON.

